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Tim, the Mule Boy of the Mines.

BY CHARLES MORRIS.



BUT THE MURDEROUS BLOW WAS NOT GIVEN. LITTLE TIM WAS SAVED; FOR AT THAT INSTANT THE VILLAIN WAS SEIZED FROM BEHIND.

Lame Tim,

The Mule Boy of the Mines;

OR,
(Life Among the Black Diamonds.

BY CHARLES MORRIS,
AUTHOR OF "THE BOSS BOY," "WILD WILL,"
"BILLY BAGGAGE," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A MINER'S SUPPER TABLE.

"GIT now, you lazy cur! Git, I say! or I'll kick a hole in your upper works quicker nor a mule'd kick through an inch plank. Jist you try to play it on me, and you'll find it ain't that stuck-up mine boss you're a-foolin' with. Mind that!"

The speaker was a raw-boned six-footer, brawny-armed and broad-shouldered. He was evidently a miner, for his face was as begrimed as coal dust could make it, and his muscular arms were blackened to the elbow. The harsh, stern lines of his face bespoke a hard character, which could be brutal on occasion, and his voice had a rasping violence in its tone.

The party addressed was a boy, who might have been sixteen or eighteen years of age, but was very small for his years. His face was intelligent, but narrow and pinched, as if he had been half-starved, while there was a scared look in his eyes, as of one who is in constant dread.

He held a bucket in his hand, with which he walked away at the stern order. As he walked he limped. Evidently he was lame. The man looked angrily after him.

"And don't lose no time, neither," he yelled. "I won't have no snails loafin' about me. And when I say a thing I mean it. Mind that!"

The boy made no answer, but moved on without complaining. Yet there was evidently a rebellious feeling in his heart, which showed itself in his face.

"I s'pose I never git tired," he muttered to himself. "I s'pose I's made of wrought iron, like a steam ingine. Arter a chap's been mule drivin' all day he mought be gi'n a rest, I think. But I daresn't open my mouth, for fear Pickax Pete'll jump down my throat."

He limped on up the mountain path to where a clear spring gushed out of the living rock, and filled a deep basin ere its overflowing waters bubbled into a narrow stream, almost buried under its thick-growing grasses.

The place from which he had started was a miner's dwelling, or hut, as it would be better called. It was a roughly planked structure, of three, or perhaps four small rooms, dropped carelessly down at the mountain foot, and surrounded by a rudely-tilled garden plot, inclosed by a broken-down fence.

"Give me the water," growled the burly miner, as the boy returned with his burden. "And dig in an' see if Sukey's ready with the grub, for I'm hungry as a catamount."

He snatched the bucket from the boy's hand,

and proceeded to vigorously wash his arms and face, bringing back some of the original color of his skin.

"There! I begin to feel like a Christian," he grumbled, as he shook the drops from his fingers. "Where's that blasted lazy Tim? I s'pose he's gobblin' the grub, hang his pictur'!"

The boy reappeared at this moment.

"Supper's ready," he announced.

He took the basin, and began to wash himself, a little fearfully, as if in dread that his slightest action might rouse the anger of the tyrant. Nor was he wrong.

"Seems to me yer gettin' thunderin' nice," growled the miner, as Tim emptied the blackened water from the basin and refilled it from the bucket. "The water your betters has washed in ain't good 'nough for you, hey? Water's mighty plenty where you was brung up, I calk-'late? A regular 'ristocrat, you is! Next thing you'll want to be fed on chiny. But if you hint sich a thing, if I don't bu'st your brainpan I'm a beggar! Mind that!"

The scowling tyrant turned and stamped angrily into the cottage, leaving the trembling boy to finish his ablutions. It was bad enough to be blamed for possible faults, but Tim was no more likely to ask for china plate than for marble statues. He knew no more of the one than of the other.

Finishing his washing he timidly entered the cottage. The room in which he now found himself was a narrow, and very sparsely furnished apartment. A considerable portion of it was taken up by a cooking stove, and by a rude closet, for its few pots, pans and dishes. A table, spread with a supper of dry bread and fried pork, occupied another portion of the room. At this table Pickax Pete was busily occupied. Further back, leaning over a pan that spluttered on the stove, was the woman who had been called by the unmelodious name of Sukey. She was a robust, but thin-featured personage, with a complaining expression on her visage, as if accustomed to look upon the shady side of life. She officiated as mistress of the mansion, being the wife of Peter Plumtree, or Pickax Pete, to give him his mine name.

"What are you loafin' about, Tim?" asked Pete, a little mollified by his supper. "Come here, and swaller your grub! Ther's no use starvin' yourself, as I kin see, when pork's plenty."

The boy very willingly accepted this invitation, for his day's work had made him hungry; and the meal proceeded in silence, there being no conversation beyond an occasional growl from the miner, such as a tiger might make over his food.

Sukey now took up the pan from the stove, and emptied its contents into a grimy dish.

"Yere's some fried apples, Pete," she remarked. "I got some from the green-stuff peddler to-day, 'cause I thought as you mought like 'em."

"Me like 'em?" roared Pete. "Me like sich slush as that? I wonder what you take me fur, Mrs. Plumtree, a-wastin' my hard-earned money on sich truck? H'ist it out the winder, and let the hogs root it up. It's only fit for them."

"I guess not," answered the woman, decidedly.

"If you don't want it you needn't eat it, that's all. You're not the only one that's to feed in this yere house. Tim and me can eat the apples, and we're not hogs neither."

Mrs. Plumtree was evidently not afraid of her tyrannical husband. Tim, whose face had fallen at the proposition to throw it to the hogs, brightened up again. It was not often he got a relish to his fried bacon.

"Good Lord, sich taste!" grumbled the miner. He pushed his chair violently back from the table. "I s'pect it'll be roast punkin' next, or fricasseed chestnut burrs. 'Tain't everybody as has got a French cook, like Mrs. Plumtree. If you want to swaller that trash, swaller it, and don't be goin' on about it, an' a-coaxin' me to eat it. Hang it, woman, do you s'pose I ain't had no fetchin' up?"

"Git your pipe, Pete, and make yourself scarce," she quietly answered. "Nobody ain't goin' to coax you."

"All right! Stuff yerself as much as you want to. The boy's choking hisself now. I dunno how it is that walkin' skeletons kin take in so much provender. Why, he'd mak a famine in a corn-crib, that boy."

Pete threw down the red coal with which he had been lighting his pipe, flung open the door of the cottage, and stalked heavily out, his voice sinking into a low growl.

"Your room's better nor your company," remarked Sukey, after her lord and master had passed out of hearing. "Everything goes wrong when you're about. And when you ain't, too, for that matter. Everything's allers going wrong."

She heaved a deep sigh.

"We're poor, miserable, unhappy critters, Tim. But no matter—let's eat the apples."

Tim made no ado in obeying orders. He had heard Mrs. Plumtree's opinions of matters and things before, and was not likely to let them spoil his appetite.

"My eyes, they're mighty good!" exclaimed the poor lad, who could almost have eaten boiled flints with a relish, by way of variety. "They're jist prime!"

"Do you like 'em, Tim?" asked Sukey, gratified by his praise.

"Sooner have them than ice-cream and pound-cake," asserted the boy, as he continued to eat.

"I don't fancy you know much 'bout that sort o' vittals," laughed Sukey.

"Don't I?" exclaimed Tim, earnestly. "Red Mike guv me a spoonful onc't, down at Scranton, when we went there on a picnic. Lawsee! I thought I'd swallowed an ice-house! Don't like that kind of cold vittals."

Sukey laughed at Tim's experience of ice-cream. She began to clear the table.

"Bring me in some water, boy," she commanded.

Tim obeyed this order with more alacrity than he had that of her husband. It was given in a very different tone. He brought in the remainder of the bucket of water from which they had washed.

"That's right, Tim. Now make yerself scarce while I clean up."

Tim strolled out of doors. He had made an unusually good supper, and felt happy accord-

ingly. He sneaked quietly around the corner of the house, for Pickax Pet sat smoking just in front, and the boy felt that he could enjoy life better out of sight of his burly tormentor.

The miner had seated himself on a half-rotten stump, the remnant of a tree that had once shaded the cottage. With crossed legs and arms, he sat puffing volumes of smoke from his pipe.

A spare-framed neighbor strolled up from a near cottage. He also was puffing at a begrimed pipe.

"Hello, Pete! Supper over, hey?"

"You bet!" answered Pete. "Squat yerself, Jake, and let's hear from ye. Yonder's a stone about your pattern."

Jake took the seat pointed out.

"How's things down your drift, Pete?"

"Blue as thunder and lightnin'. How d'ye find 'em, Jake?"

"Shady, shady," answered Jake, with an ominous shake of the head.

"Ther's no use talkin', lad. Something's got to be did afore long. Mind that!"

"I've a notion ye're 'bout right," and Jake pulled gloomily at his pipe.

"It's fat cuttin's for the mine bosses; but it's lean as starved mutton for us. You take that in," asserted Pete. "I'm one as ain't fur standin' it. I'm not quarrelsome, Jake. You know that. But I don't like to be walked over and spit on; and I swear I won't be, neither." He ended with a fierce oath.

Jake coughed. He was not quite ready to testify to his friend's peaceable disposition. He hitched himself nearer to Pete, and his voice fell.

"Tell you what it is," he remarked. "The boys down our way are doin' some queer talk. The bosses 'll wake up some fine mornin' and find the skies is down. You see?"

"They're gettin' cantankerous?"

"Deuced cantankerous."

"If ther's a strike in the air, I'm yer boss. Nobody never knowed Pete Plumtree to go back on the boys. Mind that!"

Jake hitched himself still nearer, and his voice fell to a whisper.

"It's in the air, Pete. To-morrow night. At Red Mike's in the valley. Nine o'clock sharp's the hour, and mum's the word. D'ye take?"

"Do I look like a jackass that's been brought up on buttermilk?" growled Pete. "Of course I take. What are you buyin' me fur? If there's fun afloat, I'm your man!"

"Hush! You mought be heard. Where's that boy of yours?"

"Who? Tim?" asked Pete, looking savagely around. "You ain't got no notion he'd peach? Why, I'd chop the young rat up into shoestrings and sell 'em at a penny a grab, if he as much as opened his potato-mill."

And Pete's fierce expression showed that he meant it all.

CHAPTER II.

WHAT HAPPENED AFTER DARK.

BETWEEN eight and nine o'clock of the next evening there was considerable movement in the valley below Edge Hill, the name of the mountain on which the mining village bordered. It

was a moonless night, and only the stars threw their faint light upon the gloomy scene. Yet the figures which were making their way through the deep shadows seemed to have no difficulty. They were probably too well acquainted with the locality to need daylight to direct them.

From whatever quarter they came they seemed to all move toward one point. This was a miner's house which stood on the lower level of the valley near a winding stream which ran briskly down the glen. It appeared, so far as could be seen in the darkness, a larger habitation than that of Pickax Pete.

A faint light shone from one window, and it was toward this that the movements of the dark figures were directed. One by one they passed through its dim line of light, their stealthy movement revealed for an instant, ere they again disappeared in the darkness beyond.

At the same hour that these mysterious movements were taking place another figure came down the narrow village lane that ran past the rendezvous of the miners. But this person was evidently of a different stamp. His erect, swinging walk was in marked contrast with their slouching gait. His well-cut, gentlemanly attire differed widely from their soiled, worn and ill-fitting clothes. Their sullen silence was replaced in him by a song which he hummed to himself as he walked briskly on. In form he was tall and stout, in face open, good natured and shrewd.

Yet this person seemed to be moving in the same direction with the sullen figures who skulked through the fields. His course took him directly toward the rendezvous of the miners.

In fact, he came opposite it just as one of the latter was making his signal knock upon the door. Something peculiar in the latter arrested the attention of the new-comer. He paused in his walk, and remained silent, hidden in the darkness, his eyes fixed keenly upon the door. He could but make out faint outlines of the figure, but some low words came distinctly to his ears.

"Who comes there?" was asked from within.

"Schuykill Sam."

"On what business?"

"Foul weather to tyrants."

"Enter, brother."

The door opened just wide enough for the visitor to slip in, and was instantly closed. The unseen listener to this mysterious conversation gave vent to a low whistle of surprise.

"Ha!" he ejaculated, "there's deviltry afoot, then. Come, come, this may be a lucky walk of mine. I've smelt powder in the air for a month past. 'Foul weather' eh! By Jove, is that pointing to me? It's well to be on guard, at any rate. This is Red Mike's shanty, and he is the head rascal of the lot. But let him beware that he does not butt too hard against me. I have him spotted, the red haired villain!"

He resumed his walk, a stern look replacing the good nature of his face. There was evidently trouble ahead. His eyes glanced keenly to right and left as he advanced.

Dark as it was his vigilance was not unre-

warded. The faint illumination of the starlight revealed to his keen eyes two figures, one on each side of the road, who were taking the direct course for Red Mike's habitation. The observer stood in the shadow of a tree until they had passed. He did not wish to be seen.

"It's a movement in force," he said, with a grim smile. "There threatens to be trouble afloat, and plenty of it. I'd give a breaker full of coal to get a hint of what's going on among those fellows. I might disguise myself, and get in by using their password, but they know me too well, and it would be a sorry trick for me if I was discovered."

He shook his head and walked on. It was destined to be a journey of surprises for him. He had not gone very far before his attention was attracted by the sound of voices at no great distance in advance. Suspecting that these might have something to do with the secret meeting he moved forward with great caution. He was sufficiently interested in the purpose of the conspiracy to be willing to take any means to discover it.

A row of trees here bordered the road, throwing a deep shadow out to its center. It was very dark under their shelter, and he took advantage of this to approach the talkers as closely as possible.

Soon their voices became more distinct. He could make out words, though they spoke in cautious tones. The voice of a boy mingled in the conversation.

The eavesdropper smiled knowingly.

"I ought to know that voice," he said to himself.

A few more steps were cautiously taken which brought him more under the covert of the trees. He could easily now make out the conversation.

But it is necessary to leave him there and go back a little in the events of that night. There were others of our characters concerned in this outdoor conversation on subjects not intended for the general ear.

Immediately after supper that evening Tim Truepenny, which was the given name of Pickax Pete's boy, limped away from the miner's cottage, after helping Mrs. Plumtree in her work.

He had an object in view which he wished to effect while the summer twilight lasted. He made his way along the edge of the mountain, following a narrow path which had been made through the thick bushes, which clothed the foot of the slope.

Tim kept on for nearly a mile, crossing numerous small streams, and winding through the undergrowth.

"I'm afeard it'll be dark afore I get there," he muttered. "And if that cloud comes up, it's goin' to be blue dark to-night. I wish the critters was plenty nearer home."

In fact, Tim was out on a visit to his rabbit-traps, which he had set in a thicket famous for that long-eared tribe.

On this occasion he was successful. He found a brace of rabbits in his traps. Removing the game, and resetting the traps, he started on his return journey. He had tied the legs of the rabbits together and flung the cord around his

neck, so that the furry creatures hung down in front of him.

"Guess I'll take the short cut 'cross the valley," he remarked. "Don't keer if the boys does see me now. They can't tell where the traps is by smellin' the rabbits."

The darkness was now thickening. Twilight had faded out, and dusky shadows fell within every copse and glen. Only on the open plain a faint light remained. Tim was a considerable distance from home, and made his way slowly along the grassy vale, following the course of the stream. There was a pleasant air moving, and he highly enjoyed his summer-night walk.

It was considerably past eight o'clock when he came out on the edge of the lane that ran down past Red Mike's cottage. He seated himself for a moment on a knoll near the fence to enjoy the cooling air. A thick bush threw its shadows on the boy, and hid him from the view of two men, who came across the open field in that direction. They were conversing in low and earnest tones.

Tim was not specially inclined to listen to what was not intended for his ears, but he had no reason to imagine that these men were giving their secrets to the winds, so he did not move. They paused on coming opposite him, and looked heedfully around.

"If the boys says buck him, buck him's the word!" one of them remarked, in savage tones. "And I'm the boy as 'ill do it, if it's put on me. I hate him like p'ison."

"I don't love him," replied the other. "But I wouldn't like to take my own hands to him, I confess that."

"You wouldn't, eh? I'd as lieve choke him as I would a cat. Why, shoot him, he giv me slack yesterday jist 'cause I opened my Davy to git a spark fur my pipe. I paid him back with jaw, and the fust thing I knowed he clipped me under the chin, and down went my house! I'll clip him next, bu'st him."

The man's voice was full of concentrated savageness.

"Hush!" warned the other. "You're talkin' too loud. Let's git on to Mike's. If Jack Manly was to hear—"

"He'll feel afore he'll hear," interrupted the other. "Gin me a safe clip at him and see if I don't bu'st his brainpan."

Their conversation was suddenly interrupted. Tim at this moment sprung up from his covering bush, his young face burning with indignation.

"You—you big coward!" he cried, with bitter contempt. "You haven't got the heart to face Mr. Manly. And he jist served you right when he knocked you down. I s'pose you want to blow up the mine jist when you please!"

The men were thunderstruck by this fierce assault, uttered with all the indignation in Tim's young soul. His slight frame trembled with excitement as he spoke.

"Hillo!" cried the miner, "what popinjay have we raised here? Who is it that's blowin' Jack Manly's horn in that style?"

He grasped Tim's shoulder and pulled him out of the shadow of the bushes. He then glared savagely down into his face.

"Ha! it's you, you little mule monkey, is it? So ye'r' spyin' on us, blast you! Goin' back to blow on us, I s'pose?"

He gave the boy a fierce shake between every sentence.

"I didn't spy on you," cried Tim, as soon as he could get breath. "And I never blowed on nobody. But I'll say Mr. Manly served you right if you shake me to pieces."

"You will, you young viper? There's other ways then besides shakin'. We'll see if I can't cure you of meddlin' in men's bizness."

He grasped Tim firmly while he drew back his brawny arm. The boy was too angry to be frightened, though he shrunk from the savage face that glared upon him.

"Don't!" cautioned the miner's companion.

"Tim won't blow."

"Who's doin' this thing?" cried the fierce miner. "By the seven pipers—"

He paused astounded. For at that moment the boy was torn from his grasp and a stern face confronted him.

"Well?" came in firm, severe accents. "Go on. Finish your sentence!"

The two men fell back in dismay, while they gazed on this apparition with startled eyes.

"Jack Manly, by all that's unlucky!" cried the second miner.

"At your service!" was the sarcastic reply.

"Don't let me interrupt you. I am highly interested in your conversation."

The next moment the two men had turned, and were retreating at a full run across the field, as much frightened as if they had seen a ghost.

The person who had given them this scare was the individual of whom we have already spoken; he who had passed Red Mike's, and had stopped on hearing voices at the roadside.

A grim smile curled his lips as he followed the retreating men with his eyes.

"Cowards and villains!" he muttered. "I wish I knew what deviltry you are hatching. So, Tim, my lad, these fellows were going to do you a harm, eh?"

"It looked like it, Mr. Manly," answered Tim, respectfully.

"Who were they?"

"It was Jake Brace and Blowhard Tom. That's all us boys calls him."

"A good name too," smiled Mr. Manly. "But what was it all about?"

"They're swearin' to sarve you out, Mr. Manly. Tom says you knocked him down, and he's a-goin' to clip you fur it."

"Knocked him down did I? For carrying an open lamp in the fire-damp? I wish I had broken the fool's jaw, and I might have stopped his wagging it so glibly."

The two fugitives meanwhile had run on until they reached Red Mike's cottage. Giving the appointed signal they were admitted, and found themselves in a room which already contained a dozen men, who nearly filled its narrow space.

These were seated around on chairs, boxes, or on the floor in lieu of other support. Their begrimed and sallow faces, faintly lit by the light of a tallow candle, looked spectral, as they fixed their eyes on the new-comers.

"Yer late, boys," remarked Red Mike, the proprietor, whose shock of red hair showed the origin of his name. "What's kept you?"

"Nothin' but a bit of a rat in our tracks," replied Tom. "That boy of yourn, Pickax Pete—that little devil of a Tim Truepenny—jist look out fur him."

"Why?" asked Pete, savagely.

"'Cause he's a young traitor, that's all. He trailed us, and cotched us sayin' some 'at 'bout Jack Manly, an' the young hound swore he'd blow on us."

"He did?" cried Pete, rising to his feet, with a face that burned with anger. "Then if I don't scorch it out of him my name ain't Pete Plumtree! He's been gittin' thunderin' cantankerous of late, but he's got no fool to deal with when he's got me. Mind that!"

CHAPTER III.

THE RENDEZVOUS AT RED MIKE'S.

THE conspirators who had so stealthily gathered into their assembly-room at Red Mike's, were as hardened and reckless-looking a set of reprobates as could well have been got together. With heavy, lowering brows, dull but fierce eyes, unkempt and matted hair, faces and hands begrimed with the black dust of their daily labor, their sallow complexions made ghastly by the faint candle-light, they presented a most unprepossessing appearance. And there was a bitter energy of tone, as they took the oath which Red Mike administered to them, which showed that they were in deadly earnest in their purpose.

"It's not for fun it is, that ye've come here," remarked that auburn-haired personage. "Be jabbers, boys, we're not that sort as puts ourselves out o' the way fer a bit of a screed. It's work as is in the wind, and sorry's the day ef we don't come up to the livin' o' that Manly, an' maybe a peg or two beyant. Am I right, boys? Ef it's so don't be 'feared to spake your minds."

"'Feared is it!" roared a black-muzzled fellow who sat back of the speaker. "An' what do you take us for, thin? D'ye s'pose we's got no hearts in our carcasses, Red Mike, as ye talk so like an idiot? It's little bones I'd make at all at all o' tellin' him his carackter till his face. An' that's me, wid Patsy McDoon fur me name."

"Ye've had many a chance, Patsy," retorted Pickax Pete, in a contemptuous tone. "Why didn't ye do it, since ye're so bold? He wouldn't have eat you if you spoke back when he guv you his 'pinion in short-hand last Tuesday come a week. Ye've got a bold tongue now, but you were as mute as a kicked mule then."

"An' if I was I had good r'ason for't," growled Patsy. "It's my motto, as ther's a time fur everything."

"Belay all that!" cried another of 'the gang. "This isn't the time for blowing. We've been brung here together by order of the head center, and it isn't fer to growl and call hard names, I'll be warrant for that. I move we perceed to bizness."

"Which is we's to decide what's to be done with that hard-headed mine boss, as ain't got

no reason nor no sense in him," supplied Red Mike.

"I move we fling him in the sump," suggested one.

"Or tie him to a breast and light the blast," chimed in another.

"Or drop him down the old Carline shaft," remarked a third.

"Or soften his brains wid a monkey-wrench, and toss him on the lift track," was the fourth suggestion.

"Has any fool else got anything else to say?" asked Pickax Pete, sarcastically. "Spit it out, if ye have, and when ye're done talkin' blasted stuff and nonsense we'll come down to common sense, if nobody's got no 'jections. A feller mought think that Jack Manly was a baby and was axin' you to rock his cradle. But ye'll find he's another sort. Mind that now!"

"Hist!" warned one of the party.

All grew silent in alarm.

"It's only a limb of the oak tree outside, scrapin' the roof," explained Red Mike. "It's a way it has. Howsomever, boys, maybe we's a bit saft in havin' nobody on the lookout. Ther's quick ears beyant and some of our chat mought slip through the walls. I move that Patsy McDoon be the man."

"Sure an' I's got no 'jections," answered Patsy. "But, I'd like to have a bit pistol or summat. Ef it's Manly hisself as comes spyin' 'bout here I'll plug him. Faix, I'd like nothin' better."

"Don't shoot 'cept ye can't help it," returned Mike. "Shootin's dangerous. Drop him a tip o' the blackthorn or pitch the omadhoun in the creek. Likely, though, there's no one there. But it's as cheap to be safe as not. And a bit cheaper, maybe."

The conference ended in Patsy taking his stand outside the door of the cottage, concealed by the thick shadows thrown by the close leaved oak which overhung the building.

Their sentinel being thus posted, the conspirators proceeded more regularly in their deliberations. For some reason they bitterly hated Jack Manly, the mine superintendent. But they feared him quite as much as they hated him, and were somewhat in the predicament of the mice in the fable. There was no one very willing to "bell the cat."

"Ther's no back water in the man," remarked Red Mike, in a surly tone. "He's all grit. I'll say that for him, and I ain't wastin' no love on him."

"Some on us has got to tip him the bludgeon, anyhow," answered Bill Bates. "Jist to hammer some sense into his thick skull. It's not to quite murder him, ye know."

"Faix an' I wouldn't drop no tears on his coffin," Mike savagely answered. "I move we pull the straws for the chap as is to do it."

This proposal was readily accepted. A number of straws of different lengths were prepared, and concealed in Mike's hand, with their ends equally exposed.

"The longest straw is the one that's to give Jack Manly a tip on the brainpan. D'ye take?"

"Ay, ay!"

"Pull, thin. And luck till ye."

One by one the miners stepped up and pulled

their straws in silence. They looked nervously at the results, some of them a little pale.

"It's Pickax Pete, for a shebang!" cried Bill Bates.

"It's me, is it?" and a dark scowl came on Pete's face. "Well, I'm his hoss. If I don't fetch him a sockdologer as'll make him see—"

The sentence was never ended. For at that instant there came from outside the sharp report of a pistol, that rung like a carronade in their startled ears.

"May the devil fly away wid us, but I know its tone!" cried Red Mike. "It's the voice of the bit of a hoss pistol as Patsy carried in his pocket. The hasty fool! I warrant he's killed somebody, and raised the whole place."

"Is it he?" exclaimed another. "He couldn't hit an owl if it was winkin' in his face. But the noise is wuss nor the harm."

They ran hastily out, not knowing what disaster to expect.

But leaving them to their quest, we must go somewhat back in our story, to trace the circumstance which led to this alarming shot.

We left the boy, Tim Truepenny, in company with the mine superintendent, after the two startled miners had ran away from them.

Tim gazed with much interest into the face of his companion, so far as he could see it in the darkness.

"They mean you a harm, sir, I fear," faltered the boy. "They was talkin' about it when I chanced to hear them. I'm kind of sorry I let them see me, or I mought have found out something."

"I heard you, Tim," patting his head. "You're a brave and bold little fellow. But you must not risk yourself that way on my account. I fear they would have hurt you if I had not been at hand."

"They had no business talkin' so," cried the boy, indignantly. "You've been a friend to me, Mr. Manly, and I won't stand by and hear a word said ag'in' you. But you must look out for 'em, sir. They're a bad set."

The gentleman laughed as he continued to pat the boy's head.

"I have one friend in the mines, at any rate," he remarked. "But what's that you have about your neck, my boy?"

"That? Oh, that's only a couple of rabbits, as I took out of my traps."

"Aha! been poaching, eh? Well, well! I hope you may enjoy your rabbits—I would give something handsome to know what is going on at Red Mike's to-night."

These last words were spoken in an aside. They were not intended for Tim, but his quick ears caught them.

"At Red Mike's?" he repeated, quickly. "Was it there they were going?"

The boy had seen something, too.

"Hallo, midget! You've got your ears open, I see. But you needn't mind what I said. It's precious little matter to me what they do. Get home with your rabbits, Tim. And beware how you meddle with these ruffians. Leave me to fight my own battles."

The gentleman walked on, leaving his boyish companion alone on the roadside. Tim fol-

lowed him with his eyes until he had vanished in the darkness.

"Such a dear, kind gentleman!" murmured the boy gratefully. "Nobody couldn't be better to me. And these men down on him 'cause they can't all be bosses in the mine. I wonder what's going on at Red Mike's? Somethin' ag'in' Mr. Manly, I fear."

He moved slowly on, his mind full of strange thoughts. It was not long ere he came within sight of Red Mike's cottage, from which the faint line of candle-light still came. The sight of it seemed to give the boy a sudden resolution.

"They are plottin' there ag'in' Mr. Manly. I'm sure of it," he exclaimed. "It's a cryin' shame, so it is, arter the way he's treated everybody. I don't like to listen but I's got a notion to do it. S'pose they'll kill me if they catch me, but I guess nobody'd miss me much."

The boy hesitated for a minute, and then seemed to have made up his mind. He moved cautiously across the dark fields toward the cottage. He grew still more careful as he came near it, anxiously seeking to discover if any one was on the watch.

He could see no one on guard. In a few minutes he was close to the cottage, approaching it from the rear, and out of the light thrown by the candle. Soon he was crouching under its walls. But his hopes were destined to be blasted. Thin as were the frame walls of the cottage not a sound came through them to his ears.

The disappointed spy crept slowly around the building, hoping to gain some point of vantage, from which he might hear what was going on within. He had in this way made nearly the complete circuit of the place, when his attention was attracted to a window that stood a crack open. A faint sound of voices came to him from within.

The boy felt anxiously around him. His hand fell on an overturned bucket. Quickly he drew it forward and mounted on it. This raised him so that his head was just below the window. He caught the sill with his two hands and drew himself up.

The shutter was open a mere crack, but the sash was raised, and some words spoken within fell distinctly on his sharp ears. Tim gave a start of alarm on catching the purport of these words.

It was a perilous movement. The bucket fell over, with a slight clank of its iron handle. His hold on the window loosened, and he fell to the ground.

It was just at the moment when Patsy, the watchman, after completing one round of the cottage, was slowly making his way around it again.

He heard the sound, saw something move in the darkness, and his braggart courage fled from him at the sight.

With a trembling hand he clutched the pistol, and fired almost at random in the darkness. There followed a deep groan, and then the form disappeared.

The next moment the conspirators came pouring out from the cottage, their faces white with dread.

"What is it? What the divil have ye done, ye idyot? Weren't ye told not to shoot, dang yer picter?"

"Sorry the one of me knows," cried the trembling guard, "but I fotched him, anyhow. Bring a light here, somebody; mebbe it's Jack Manly hisself."

Red Mike hastened to comply, snatching up the candle which burned within. He ran to the spot where Patsy stood with blanched face.

"Where! Be jabbers, there's nothin' here! Hang me if the fool ain't been shootin' at his own shadder! Blest if I didn't think he had more backbone nor that."

Patsy made no reply, but pointed steadily downward at the overturned bucket. Drops of blood on it met their startled eyes.

CHAPTER IV.

AMONG THE BLACK DIAMONDS.

It is the morning after the events just narrated, but the sun has not risen and will not rise in the locality in which we now find ourselves.

Only some glimmering lights here and there dispel the thick darkness, as they reveal a scene such as the morning sun never yet shone upon.

It seemed, indeed, like the interior of some mighty underground dungeon hall, with its gloomy, dark-roofed avenues stretching out until lost in the dim distance, and walled with the living rock.

At intervals, narrow passages appeared like the openings to the dungeon cells of this dread prison, their walls of a glossy black that shone luridly in the lamp-light of the gloomy inclosure.

Here and there spectral-like forms moved quickly along the avenues, appearing and disappearing, each with a gleam of light upon his forehead, while now and then the sound of voices rolled and reverberated from the high arched roof of some wide underground chamber.

Yet there was nothing supernatural about the scene, nor was it an underground dungeon, such as it might have appeared to an excited fancy. It was simply a huge mountain excavation, made by the busy delvers after the black diamonds of the Pennsylvania hills. It was, in short, the interior of the Edge Hill coal mine, to which we now introduce our readers.

The human specters who worked here in silence and gloom were preparing the sparkle of the firelight, and the cheering warmth, whose charm was destined to be enjoyed without a thought for the poor fellows who toiled so laboriously underground to spread happiness and comfort afar off. It is perhaps as well for the pleasure of mankind that "one half of the world does not know how the other half lives."

But few such thoughts come into the minds of Pickax Pete and his partner Bill Bates, as they vigorously sink their picks into the broad breast of coal before them. It has been shattered by a recent blast, and the broken masses of coal yield readily to their picks.

They stand in a long, narrow space of some seven feet in height. To their left a narrow passage is cut downward through the rock, form-

ing a chute, down which the coal rapidly slides into the cars which stand at its lower end. Bill is tossing the broken masses into the chute as they yield to the strong blows of the iron bars.

After a while Pete pauses and leans upon the handle of his instrument, as he wipes the sweat from his begrimed face.

"That was a derved queer contraption last night, Bill," he remarked, first looking cautiously around him. "Maybe you kin tell me what sort o' bird Patsy brung down, but it's not me that kin see through it."

Bill also made a careful survey of the locality before answering. He then seated himself on a great lump of coal, and rested his hands on his knees.

"Ther's somethin' mighty pecoolar 'bout it," he slowly rejoined. "We hunted the place far an' wide, as you well know, and there weren't a screed o' nothin' to be seen. On'y fer them blood-drops on the bucket I'd swear Patsy was a-saltin' us. But blood isn't to be whistled down."

"I hev an idee," remarked Pete.

"You hev?"

"It's 'bout that boy o' mine, Bill. That lazy young hound, Tim. You know what Blowhard Tom said 'bout the little rat?"

"Yes."

"Well," and Pete's voice sunk low. "He turned up 'mong the missin'. Divil the step did he come home last night. And betune you an' me, Bill, I'm dub'us but ther's trouble."

Bill gave a shrill whistle.

"You don't tell me that? You think it was Tim that Patsy shot?"

"Faith it looks mighty like it."

"But what come of him then? He couldn't ha' sunk into the ground. It would be blamed awkward if the boy should turn up dead."

"I dunno whether I'd sooner have him dead nor alive," answered Pete, gloomily. "S'pose he heard us from the winder and blowed the whole game to Jack Manly? Wouldn't there be the very Old Nick to play in the mine?"

He surlily resumed his pick, and gave a fierce blow to the face of the coal, that brought down a shower of rattling fragments. There was an energy in his movement as if he had struck the iron point at the heart of his foe.

At that moment a mine lamp appeared at a short distance from them, and the sound of approaching steps was heard. A dim figure emerged from the darkness. It was the tall and well-set form of Jack Manly, the superintendent of the mine. A dark frown came upon the faces of the two men as they observed him.

But Manly's countenance wore its usual open, good-humored expression. He walked up to the miners. He stopped a moment, and looked at their work, which they surlily continued, as if not observing him.

"A good blast that, my hearties," he remarked. "You'll get a fair ten ton out of it. Ha! what are these cartridges doing here?"

His tone suddenly grew stern, and a severe look came upon his face, as he pointed downward to his feet. It was evident that Jack Manly's good-humored look could change to a very stern one.

"We ain't had no time to put them away,"

answered Pete, in sullen apology. "I don't see as they're doin' no harm there, anyway."

"They are doing this much harm," replied Manly, in short, decided accents, "they are breaking the rules of the mine. I should fancy you would know by this time that I won't have those rules broken. Put those cartridges where they belong instantly, and let me see no more such carelessness."

He was very sharp and positive. Pickax Pete looked up with a harsh frown on his brow.

"Maybe you're thinkin', Mr. Jack Manly—" he began insolently.

But he was cut short.

"It's no matter what I think," retorted Manly. "You have heard what I said. This mine is not big enough to hold two bosses, or to have two sets of rules. Are you going to put those cartridges away, or vacate, which?"

He was evidently angry. His keen eye fixed itself on the form of the burly miner with a stern glance. Pete looked for a moment as if he would have liked to dispute his authority. But there was something of the magnetic in that fixed gaze. He stooped down and began slowly to pick up the scattered blasting cartridges. The superintendent moved onward impatiently.

He walked on with his free stride. His lamp glimmered for a minute upon the shining faces of the coal. Then its light disappeared in the distance.

Pete continued sullenly to gather up the cartridges. There were seven or eight of them, which had been carelessly flung upon the floor of the passage.

"He's pretty sharp, Pete," remarked Bill, "but I dunno as he's far wrong. Things has to be kept in some sort of order, that's sure."

"What the blazes are you gettin' onter your brainpan?" cried Pete angrily. "Goin' to take him up an' apologize fer him, are ye? Hang his dirty hide, it ain't the fust time, nohow, as he's dug inter me fur nothin'. Do you want to take him up, Bill Bates?"

"Did I say I did?" asked Bill. "You needn't jump down a feller's throat, Pete, everytime he happen, to open his mouth."

"Ye haven't furgot last night?" asked Pete, after again cautiously looking around. "I drewed the long straw, Bill. I guess you know what that means. Pickax Pete ain't the man to go back on his word."

"But wait till that mystery of the spy is settled," warned Bill. "Fur all we know, they mought have the soft snap on us at this minute."

"That's so," answered Pete, as he placed the cartridges in the box from which they had been scattered. "I'd give somethin' nice to know what's come to that boy. If Tim's been a-spyin' on me, it 'll be a sorry spy fur him. Mind that now!"

He resumed his pick and struck a savage blow into the breast of coal. Bill rose to his feet and recommenced his task of hurling the coal into the chute. From a distance came rambling sounds of like operations.

Throughout the whole extent of the mine similar labors were enacting.

Of the many miners who wrought for black diamonds in the Edge Hill mine, but a few were in the conspiracy against Jack Manly, and these were the most unmanageable characters there, just those whose enmity was likely to be aroused by any strict supervision. And good-humored as the superintendent could be when things went well, he was a very martinet where the interests of the mine owners were concerned. There could be no neglect of orders in the mine under his care. It is not surprising that he had stirred the fierce blood of some of his subordinates.

Yet few as were these confederates, and scattered as they were through the mine, the news of Tim Truepenny's disappearance rapidly made its way among them. Long ere the day was over every one of them had heard of it, and they began to fear that their plot had already borne bitter fruit.

It came to Patsy McDoon at a point in the breast where he was just then working alone. He had fired off a blast in the coal vein, and had just returned to trace the effects of his shot. Large fragments of shining anthracite lay scattered by the force of the powder, while the vein was split in various directions. He had grasped a long bar to force it into the fractured coal, when a voice came to his ears.

"There's trouble broke loose, Patsy, I'm afeared," it said. "And it's all your little fun last night. Pete's mule boy, Lame Tim, hasn't turned up this morning, and it looks amazin' as if you'd hurt the lad."

Patsy looked hastily around. It was Blow hard Tom who spoke.

"The boy attacked me and Jake last night, you know. And jist as we was goin' to teach him manners up jumped Jack Manly, and we slid. Now, like enough, Manly put him to sp on Red Mike's; and so I'm 'feared you've made a ghost of him."

Patsy was trembling as he listened to this deduction. He began to fear that he had indeed committed murder.

"Sure there was only a wee drop o' blood," he protested. "And we could find nothin' at all, at all. If the boy was kilt, where is his corpse? Tell me that now."

"Little I know of that," answered Tom. "If I'd shot a bird on the wing, I'd watched where he fell."

"Hold your whist!" cried Patsy. "Don't be talkin' here of shootin' and the like. Why, ther's more blood in a beet nor we found."

Tom only smiled in disdain. He moved away to his own place, leaving Patsy alone. The latter was very white-faced as he raised the heavy bar and struck it with trembling hands against the coal vein. The braggart feared that he had indeed committed murder, and he looked around him fearfully. He already began to dread being alone in that dark place. He was superstitious enough to fear that the murdered boy's ghost might appear to him.

He could not bear these thoughts. Clutching the bar in his strong hands, he directed its point against a part of the vein near its upper level. He was about to drive it forward with all his strength, when a boyish, familiar voice fell upon his ears in tones of shrill warning.

"Don't strike!" it cried. "The wall is cracked above you! You will bring the coal down on your head!"

The miner looked around. A yell of terror broke from his lips as he saw Tim's pale face looking at him from the darkness. He drove the bar nervously forward into the vein. There was a loud crack, as if a cord had snapped. A crash followed. The whole avenue seemed caving in. A thunder-like roar ran through the mine.—Patsy McDoon lay crushed under ten tons of coal, which his unlucky stroke had brought down.

CHAPTER V.

DANGER IN THE ROOF.

MANY of the men working in the Edge Hill mine were destined to a serious fright that morning. It was not in the fact that Patsy McDoon had been killed by a fall of coal, for that was no uncommon circumstance. Every one there knew that it might happen to himself at any time, yet they acted as recklessly as though a granite arch was over their heads, drove their picks into a crumbling roof of coal, and trusted to chance to save them.

It was not the accident, then, but the mode in which they heard of it, that gave them a start, brought an ashy hue to their faces, and caused their limbs to tremble with dread.

For the word had passed stealthily from ear to ear of the conspirators that the boy Tim had disappeared, and had likely been killed by Patsy's unlucky shot; and some of the more superstitious already were in dread that the ghost of the murdered boy might haunt them in their gloomy underground galleries.

Schuykill Sam was just bending to drive his pick into a huge lump of coal at his feet when he heard a voice to his right. Quickly turning he peered into the gloom so faintly lit by his lamp, and with a start of terror saw peering at him the thin, pale face of Tim Truepenny. At the same moment there came the sepulchral cry:

"Run for your life! Patsy McDoon is under the coal!"

The apparition disappeared as suddenly as it had come, and left the strong man shaking as though in an ague, while great drops of sweat stood on his grimy brow.

Patsy had done the murder. Had the spirit of the murdered boy already brought retribution on him? The miner grasped his pick and ran hastily through the dark gallery, half from fear to remain alone in that haunted spot.

A minute after Pickax Pete and his partner were startled by the same cause. The boy's pale face suddenly peered on them from the gloom, and then vanished, with the cry:

"Run for your lives! Patsy McDoon is under the coal!"

Through the mine passed the alarm. Red Mike dropped the iron bar from his trembling fingers as it came to him.

Not one of the conspirators escaped the apparition, and they hurried in a trembling group, along with other miners who had been warned, toward the breast on which Patsy had been working, eager to discover if there was any truth in the alarm.

They were met by the burly form and horror-stricken face of Blowhard Tom, who had dropped his tools and run in terror into the outer gallery on the fall of the coal.

"What is the matter? Is Patsy gone down?" was the general cry.

"The roof came down," answered the trembling bully. "It was the fetch of Lame Tim. It come square out of the rock, and touched the vein, and down come the coal on Patsy."

"On, boys!" cried one of the leaders. "To the rescue! He may not be dead. Lead on, Tom, to the spot!"

"Me!" cried Tom, with a shudder. "I wouldn't go back for a million dollars. The boy's fetch is there, I tell you. It'll bring the whole roof down on us."

"Hold your blather, you cowardly spalpeen!" roared Red Mike, in a fury. "If you sell the pass on us I'll drop you a clip as you'll not soon forget," he whispered in the bully's ear. "To the rescue, boys! To the rescue!"

The miners had not waited for this appeal, but were swarming past Patsy's terrified partner and into the narrow breast in which the accident had happened. A glance showed that the alarm had not been a false one. A great heap of broken and shattered coal occupied the floor of the narrow gallery, while a blank space in the roof showed from where it had descended. No vestige of the unfortunate man was to be seen. He was completely hidden under the fallen coal.

"Quick, picks and bars! To the rescue!" cried a stalwart miner, as he drove his pick into the shattered mass. "The lad mayn't be quite dead, though I'm afeard there's a sorry show for him."

But they had not worked a minute when there was heard a shrill note of alarm. It came from the high-pitched voice of Jake Brace.

"Back!" he cried. "The vein's split for ten feet on both sides! Back for your lives! It's crumbling now! It'll be down in a heap afore you know it!"

The crowd of miners backed fearfully away at this warning. Red Mike and Bill Bates dropped their picks and followed. Jake was right. The roof was perilous. Some bits of coal had already fallen, like a danger signal. Only the first stalwart miner continued to ply his pick.

"Back, Harry! back!" came a general cry. "The roof will be down on you in a minute. Patsy's a dead man now, and we can't afford to have you smashed."

"Let it come," answered the dauntless fellow. "It's life or death, anyhow, boys. The lad may be alive, and I'm not the man to leave him there, for a trifle of danger."

"Danger! It's shaking now! And Patsy's as dead as a door nail!"

There came a sudden rush of miners, and Harry was seized and dragged forcibly back.

"You're the pride of the mine, Harry Brown, and we can't afford to lose you for that blathering fool, Patsy. And he's gone under anyway."

The speaker patted the great fellow on the shoulder, as if he had been addressing himself to a child.

The dread of the dangerous roof had communicated itself to the whole group. They hung dubiously back, their eyes fixed on the cracks that ran through the overhanging coal. Even Harry Brown, after a moment's effort to escape from his captors, resigned himself. He began to realize that his effort was foolhardy.

As they thus stood in silent expectancy a new step hastily approached, and a voice cried out:

"What are all you doing there? They tell me there's a miner under the coal! Are you the men to leave him in the lurch? I thought better of you than that! Hand me a pick!"

It was the imperious voice of Jack Manly, and it was the face of the mine superintendent that turned upon them with stern indignation.

"We'd do anything in reason," answered one of the miners sullenly. "But we've got our own lives to look after. The roof is shivered, and will be down in a jiffy."

"I didn't think the Edge Hill boys were cowards," retorted Jack, in a bitter tone, as he snatched a pickax from a miner's hand. "I'll take my chances with the best of you."

"Mebbe you think yer life's wuth nothin'," sullenly cried Pickax Pete. "And fur that matter, there's more on us tinks that same. But we've got our own lives to look after."

"Is that you, Pete Plumtree?" asked Jack, with a sharp glance. "By the gods, I knew you were a devil, but I did not think you were a coward. The man's got to be rescued, if I have to do all the work myself."

In a moment he was astride the fallen heap, and was sending the broken coal to right and left with nervous energy.

"Coward!" cried Pete, stung by the epithet. "Nobody never said that of me and told the truth. If it were the gates of Purgatory you sha'n't beat me!"

He sprang forward and drove his pick into the fallen mass. He was followed by Harry Brown. Several of the others pushed forward. The dread of the dangerous roof was replaced by a sense of shame. The vigorous arms of the volunteers rapidly made a breach in the crumbled mass.

The rapid blows shook the walls of the gallery. Slivers and fragments of coal fell from the shattered roof.

"He's a dead man!" cried Jack, after another stroke. "I see his breast, lads. It is crushed in as if a mountain had fallen upon it."

"Ware!" came a startling cry. "Back to the right! Here it comes!"

The workmen drew hastily back at this warning, and just in time, for, with a thundering crash, six feet more of the roof fell, half filling the passage, while a thick cloud of black dust hid the light of the lamps.

It was the portion of roof to the left. The miners had withdrawn to the right, as warned. Had they gone in the opposite direction there would have been more deaths to add to that of Patsy McDoon. Jack Manly stood gazing irresolutely and angrily at the wall, like a lion at bay. He could not bear that any obstacle should baffle him in his object.

"It won't do, boys"

Quick, my men! Save it before the rest is down!"

A dozen men started off at this quick order. Jack paused a moment, and then hastily followed them, as if with intent to direct their operations. Others of the men followed in his footsteps.

Those who remained behind stood in silence looking on the perilous scene, and starting as occasionally a fragment of coal detached itself and fell with a slight thud to the floor.

Some low words passed between them, but they spoke with caution, as if fearing that a loud tone might bring down the roof.

Meanwhile the other men were hurrying on through the galleries of the mine, seeking the timbers and utensils for which they had been dispatched.

Jack Manly hasted on also. He was alone, for he had taken a different direction from the others—or, at least, he fancied himself alone. He was not aware that a stealthy step followed him, that a savage face glared toward him through the darkness. He knew naught of the drawing of those murder-dealing straws.

The men remaining at the dangerous breast were soon cheered by the return of their comrades, carrying timbers with which to shore up the cracking roof.

This was soon done. Willing and skillful hands lent haste to the work. Upper timbers were laid across the top of the gallery, and supported upon uprights which rested upon the floor.

Three or four of these supports sufficed to make the roof reasonably secure, and to render it safe to continue the work of excavation. This was now rapidly proceeded with.

The broken coal was shoveled away, the larger lumps moved with bars. More and more of the form of the victim became revealed.

"What can have become of Mr. Manly?" asked Harry Brown. "It is high time he was back. You don't often find him the last when things are in a hurry."

"He didn't say where he was going," replied one of the others. "But I guess we don't need him. There's no hope, lads," he gloomily continued; "poor Patsy's as dead as a door-nail—smashed flat as a pancake."

A few minutes more sufficed to extract the dead body, which had been dreadfully crushed by the falling coal. Only the face had escaped, and it yet wore a peculiarly horrified expression that struck some of the men with a strange sensation.

"Tom said that he saw the fetch of Lame Tim," whispered Jake Brace to one of the confederates. "I believe it. Look at the dead man's face. One would think he saw the ghost yet."

It seemed so, indeed. The look of fright which his face had worn at the instant of his death was there still. The confederates shuddered as they looked at it, for it seemed ominous to them.

perintendent had pursued. He had gone perhaps a hundred yards, when the faint gleam of a miner's lamp told him that there was some person in advance.

"Wonder if that's Mr. Manly just coming back?" he muttered.

Ten paces further and he started as his eyes met a strange and startling spectacle.

For, stretched at full length on the floor of the gallery lay the form of Jack Manly, his face the hue of death, while the blood was slowly trickling from an ugly wound near his temple.

And over him bent the diminutive form of Lame Tim, who lifted a thin, red face to Harry as he approached. It seemed a dead man watched by a ghost.

CHAPTER VI.

A GHOST IN THE BUSHES.

Two men were seated on a fallen log by the side of a thicket of bushes which grew not far from the road. It was near evening, and the shadows were rapidly deepening, but there was light enough to reveal the faces of Pickax Pete and Jake Bates.

There was a dubious look on both their faces, as though they did not feel entirely comfortable in their minds.

"It wasn't judgmatical, Pete," said Jake, shaking his head dubiously. "It was too hasty; too hasty altogether. I thought as how you were a wider awake chap than that."

"What wasn't judgmatical?" asked Pete, fiercely. "What rascally blather is you gittin' through your brainpan now, Jake Bates? Hang your carcass, I won't have none of your mouthing about me. Mind that!"

"I'm afeard they'll nail it, that's all. 'Twasn't the time to tap him jist then. And some of the boys may peach to save their own bacon."

"When you get your blow out will you please 'splain what's loose? I ain't no magician to guess conundrums."

"You ain't no fool, Pete; and there's no use lettin' on you are. It's Jack Manly I'm talkin' about, and well enough you know it."

"The blazes I do! S'pose you are talkin' 'bout Jack Manly. I dunno as it's much to me, anyhow."

"He's gone under, Pete. The clip fetched him. I heered ten minutes ago as how he'd pegged out, and passed in his checks."

Pete started, while a look of pallor came upon his hardened face.

"That's a lie!" he exclaimed. "A bit of a tap with a blackthorn knot couldn't never ha' bu'sted his thick skull."

"You hit too hard, Pete. Drop it, now; there's no use tryin' to play innocent with me. You'll be tellin' me next that you didn't pull the long straw."

"He can't be dead!" repeated the hardened man, his face showing an ashy hue. "A mere touch, as wouldn't ha' given a baby the headache. You're a-playin' on me, Jake."

"Not much," and Jake shook his head gloomily. "It was Tom the Blowhard as told me, and he was skeered white as chalk. It wasn't judgmatical, Pete. The mine owners is bound to make a big row about it."

"S'pose they do. Who's to blab?"

"You was one of the boys as followed Jack Manly, when he went back into the gallery. Now that crowd's goin' to be hunted up close, let me tell you."

"There's nothin' ag'in' 'em. It mought ha' been some of the mule men. Or mebbe a lump of coal from a chute. There weren't a soul seen it done."

"Yes there was. I saw it done!"

The voice that spoke these words came from the thicket. The shadows of the coming night had gathered and thickened during the conversation, and darkness was fast replacing twilight. With exclamations of surprise and alarm, the two men sprung up and looked toward the dusky bushes behind them. There, framed in the leaves, appeared the pale, spare face of Tim Truepenny. No part of the body was visible, only the shadow-like face, with the eyes full of stern indignation.

"I saw you draw lots to kill Mr. Manly! I saw the blow struck, and the hand that done it! If he is dead, let the murderer beware!"

The face vanished as a shadow disappears. With a loud cry of horror, Jake turned and ran like a madman across the fields, wild with terror.

But Pete was made of sterner stuff. He was not the man to be scared by a legion of ghosts. A fierce oath burst from his lips, and with a mighty spring he leaped the fence, and darted into the thicket, in pursuit of the vanishing figure.

There was a thrashing of the bushes as he tore through them like an infuriated animal. He had no faith in the ghost theory, and fully believed that Tim had been playing on the fears of the men.

"Won't I play him out if I catch him, the treacherous young viper!" he hissed, as he continued his pursuit.

But it was in vain. Lame as the boy was, and rapid as had been his pursuer, no signs of him could be found. The thicket was small, and Pete traversed it from side to side and from end to end, without discovering a living being.

"It's blazin' queer!" was all he said, as he gave up his quest. But there was a look of strange perplexity in his eyes.

His search had not been thorough enough. Hardly had he gone when, at the very point where the face had appeared, there rose the small figure of Tim. It was certainly no ghost that limped out into the field, but a flesh-and-blood figure of a boy. Instead of trying to escape he had simply crouched to the earth, and let his furious pursuer dash past.

The boyish figure crossed the lot, and climbed the fence into the road. Along this he cautiously advanced, slowly approaching the house of his tormentor, as if inclined to return home.

It was now quite dusk. Tim circled past the house, carefully avoiding it, and made his way up the hill-side in the rear, toward the spring at which he was accustomed to procure water.

He had not been here but a few minutes, when footsteps were heard on the path, and the crouching boy caught sight of a figure which he at once recognized. It was Mrs. Plumtree, or Sukey, as her lord and master called her.

She leaned over the spring and filled her bucket with water. Rising with her burden she uttered a cry of alarm on seeing Tim standing before her. The bucket fell from her hand, and the water poured out over the ground.

"Don't git skeered. It's only me," the boy exclaimed. "It's only Tim, who's afeared to go home."

"Tim!" cried the woman, seizing him, and drawing him toward her. "You come up so sudden I thought it was your fetch. Why, they're talking through the mine about your being dead, and about your ghost bringing down the roof on Patsy McDoon."

"They're all fools," answered the boy. "I don't know what's got into them. Every time I show my face somebody yells out, drops his tools, and runs. You mought think I was a catamount, or a skeleton without a head."

"What's been goin' on?" asked Sukey, cautiously. "There's queer talk afloat, Tim. They say Mr. Manly's been murdered in the mine. And I've heered it whispered that Patsy McGoon shot you, and that's the reason he thought he saw your ghost."

Tim laughed, with a shade of merriment in his tone.

"The big fool!" he uttered. "Why, he aimed straight at the moon."

"But they said you disappeared, and there was blood. Jake Bates gave his wife a hint of it, and she let it out to me."

"So there was; rabbit's blood," rejoined Tim. "I had two rabbits round my neck, which come out of my traps, and some of their blood must have dropped down. I know it wasn't mine."

"Why didn't you come home, then?"

"I daresn't. I was afeared of Pete."

"What for?"

"They said I was a-spyin' on them. He'd have peppered me if he'd cotched me."

"Not where I was, Tim. If he dusts your coat a bit, that won't hurt. But he sha'n't do you a harm. But what's all this about Mr. Manly? Is he really dead?"

"Folks say so," answered Tim, with a shudder.

"Do they know who done it, Tim?"

The boy gazed cautiously around him before answering.

"I know," he replied, in a subdued tone.

"You?"

"Yes."

"Who was it, then?"

Tim shook his head.

"I want to be sure first that he's dead. If he is I'll peach on the murderer. If he isn't I'm goin' to keep still."

And the boy meant it. No entreaty could make him divulge the dangerous secret.

Sukey refilled her bucket.

"Come, Tim," she said. "Pete sha'n't hurt you. Come home."

"I'm afeared," he answered, gloomily. "He'll kill me if he cotches me."

"No he won't. What would he harm you fer?"

"You don't know—" began the boy. But he suddenly paused. He had been on the point of revealing too much.

Mrs. Plumtree was near dropping her bucket again.

"Eh!" she cried. "Was it him? Was it Pete as did it? You daren't say it, Tim."

"I didn't mean that," answered the boy, confusedly. "Only I'm deadly afeared of him. I wouldn't go home for nothin'."

"But where will you sleep? It is too cold to stay in the fields."

"I slept in the mine last night."

"Oh, my poor boy, that will never do!" The woman's tone was full of concern. "You must come with me. You can get into your room the back way, and Pete will never know it. Have you had anything to eat?"

"No. Only a bit of dry bread I found."

"Poor little fellow! Come, Tim. You shall have your supper, anyhow."

Tim limped on after the kind-hearted woman. He was very hungry, and did not mind a little danger if he got a supper by it.

They were not long in reaching the house. It was now fully dark. Against the rear end of the two-storied house was a low shed, from whose roof the upper windows could be easily gained. Sukey helped the boy to mount to the roof.

"Shin up now, and climb in your winder," she suggested. "When you git there keep quiet as a mouse, and Pete will never s'pect. I'll steal up arter while with a bit of eatables."

She made her way to the front, leaving Tim to obey her directions. She found the house as she had left it. Her worthy husband had not returned, and with a smile of satisfaction she went to work to hunt up some cold victuals, and to warm up a cup of tea for the hungry boy. Filling a plate with these provisions, and carrying the tea-cup and saucer in her other hand, Sukey walked to the stairs, with the intention to mount to Tim's small apartment.

She was unpleasantly interrupted.

The front door was flung open, a heavy step came upon the floor, and a voice with the growl of a bear rung in her surprised ears.

"What the blazes is up now, Sukey? Who are you takin' all that grub to?"

It was Pete's voice. There was a fierce suspicion in his tones. She turned around in dismay. There was no disguising her intentions.

"You've got that Tim up-stairs! It's him you're coddlin' up!"

"No it ain't, neither."

"It's a lie, woman. He's been a-playin' it on me, and by all that's good I'm bound to get even with him."

She sought to hinder him in his fierce flight to the stairs. But he caught her shoulder and wheeled her out of the way, while the cup and plate fell crashing to the floor, and their contents were widely scattered. The next moment he was dashing up the short flight of stairs.

Tim had heard the noise below, and guessed what had happened. He was trying to get out of the window to the shed roof, when Pete's hand clutched him like a vise, and dragged him within.

"You dirty little rat!" hissed the furious man. "You'll blow on me, will you? They say that dead men tell no tales. Dead boys don't, neither! You know too much!"

The trembling boy was jerked furiously back from the window.

CHAPTER VII.

MR. PRICE MAKES UP HIS MIND.

A GENTLEMAN who wore a long duster and carried a traveler's sachel in his hand, was walking at a rapid pace up the valley which led from the railroad station in the neck of the village. He had evidently just left the train, whose smoke yet floated heavily in the air to the north as it drove on its ringing way.

The traveler was a middle-aged man, with a grizzled beard, and grayish hair escaping from under his silk hat. There was a stern expression upon his handsome face. His lips were set and his eyes coldly resolute.

"Bless us all, Mr. Price, is it you?" cried a miner, taking off his hat as he recognized the gentleman. "I'm mighty glad to see you, for it's a long day since you've been here."

"Thank you, Harry," replied the gentleman, as he grasped the miner's hard hand. "The same old Harry Brown as ever, I see. But how comes it you are out of the mine to-day?"

"Had a message for Mr. Sterling, who is up yonder, you know," he pointed his thumb toward a large house on the hillside. "Of course you've heard of the trouble. Poor Jack Manly got it here from some rascal." He significantly touched his temple.

"I know," was the hurried reply. "That's what brought me. Mr. Sterling telegraphed. How is it? Is Manly dead?"

"No; thank the stars. They would have him dead in the mine; but he's good for many a long day to come."

"I am glad to hear that."

"If he gets a square show, I mean. I won't answer for him if he's to be tapped in the dark, by devils like the last."

"Trust me to see to that," answered Mr. Price, sternly. "I will curb these fellows. I am not going to have a slaughter-house made of the Edge Hill mine. Good-day, Harry; I must hurry on."

"Good-day, sir."

The stalwart miner turned away with a pleased look upon his face, while the mine-owner, with a harder expression than before, strode on up the valley.

In a few minutes he had reached the handsome brick house on the hillside, to which Harry Brown had directed him.

A sharp order to the servant at once gave him admission to the sick room to which Jack Manly had been conveyed after the assault.

He lay on a bed by the window, his handsome head supported on a high pillow, while his usually florid face was pale, and was marked by a bluish contusion near the temple. Near the bed sat a small, benevolent-faced gentleman, his eyes fixed in sympathy on the invalid.

He sprung hastily up on the entrance of the visitor.

"Ha! Mr. Price! Well, you do make good time. How are you, anyway?"

"Prime, Sterling, prime. How's the sick man? Not so bad yet, Jack, eh? Why, you're worth a dozen dead men yet."

"How do you do, Mr. Price?" answered Jack, a little feebly, but with a pleased smile on his face, as he held out his hand. "It is very kind

in you to take all the trouble to come up from the city on my account."

"Don't know if I would," replied the visitor, as he threw off his duster, "if I had known you were so brisk. I expected, from Tom Sterling's telegram, to have a quarrel, and maybe a hanging, on hand."

"It was a narrow escape," rejoined Mr. Sterling. "Only that Jack Manly is as hardy as an oak knot he wouldn't have breathed again."

Mr. Price fixed his eyes rather coldly upon the invalid. He lacked the sympathy of his partner, but had far more sternness and resolution.

"Poh! Jack Manly isn't so easy killed. Have you any inkling of the fellow that did it? Or what was the cause?"

"There is a gang in the mine who are down on me," returned Jack. "I don't know why. Nobody could treat them better."

"Except when they break the rules, and then they see blue thunder," supplied Mr. Sterling, with a smile.

"Of course. That is what I am there for," answered Jack, simply.

"You're a man, right through, Jack Manly," returned Mr. Price. "Carry out the rules if you bring down the roof. That's my logic. And, by George! I'll give you some harder ones to work with. We'll curb these hounds, or know the reason why. There's a gang, you say. Do you know them? Who was it struck you?"

"That I don't know. There's a dozen or twenty in the gang. I wouldn't want to name an innocent man."

"Innocent, the deuce! A queer innocence. If they were all hung up they'd get their just dues."

"You are too hard, Price."

"Don't tell me, Tom Sterling! I know these fellows better than you. They'd pull wool over your eyes. You are too soft-hearted to deal with such fellows. They ought to have me up here a while."

"Perhaps, in the end, you would find my way the best," protested Mr. Sterling.

"Yes, with a vengeance! Here is a sample of it. Jack Manly knocked in the head."

"For carrying out your rules, not mine!" retorted Mr. Sterling, somewhat hotly.

"There's nothing wrong about the rules," broke in Jack, from the bed. "It is only the vagabonds that object to them. And we are not running the mine in their interest. There's one or two of them that might be softened down a bit maybe."

"Softened down! I'll tighten them up. We'll see who are the bosses here; we or those rascals. Don't be looking so glum, Tom Sterling. They've got to be taught their paces. By my faith, if you had your way they'd ride rough-shod over you. They won't find me so soft-hearted. A tight rein, that's my motto. And the harder they kick, the tighter the rein."

"That might do to drive mules. It won't work to drive men," answered Mr. Sterling, shaking his head doubtfully.

"See here, Tom," answered his resolute partner, seating himself and looking more positive than ever. "You've managed the mine for the

last three years. Suppose you leave it in my hands for a month? That is all the time I ask. If my management don't make a radical improvement by that time I will hand it back to you. How's that, Jack, eh? That is not asking too much, is it?"

"I think not," replied Jack.

Mr. Sterling shook his head.

"It is very easy to deal mathematically with bank accounts, but you will find that you can't treat men like you would figures. But you can have the mine for a month. I am willing to let you try your system."

"All right, Tom. You shall see if mathematics won't work. Your system has ended in a knock-down for Jack Manly. Just see if mine don't go like clockwork."

"It wasn't my system," protested Mr. Sterling. "You had a hand in those rules."

"It is in my hands for a month, at any rate. I have been doing some hard thinking on the train. They have got to toe the mark, every soul of them. See here, I've got a new set of rules jotted down. The man that can't live up to them can walk. That's my motto."

Looking sterner and more determined than ever, Mr. Price drew a scrap of paper from his pocket, on which he had written some lines in pencil. He knitted his brows over the broken writing.

"It's ugly work to write on the train," he muttered. "Hardly know what it all means myself."

A few minutes sufficed for him to translate his hieroglyphics. He read off what he had written to his two listeners, whose looks showed that they were far from satisfied with its purport.

"Come, come," exclaimed the mild partner. "That rule will never do. The men won't stand being made slaves of."

"I mean every word of it," answered Mr. Price sternly. "Are you going to give me my month or not?"

"There will be a rebellion in the mine."

"Don't you fear that. You are entirely too soft-hearted to deal with these men. What do you say, Jack Manly? Have you the backbone to carry out these rules?"

"I don't approve of them," answered Jack, shaking his head. "But I am not responsible for them. It is my business to obey orders if I break owners. Wait till I get on my feet again, which I hope will be by to-morrow."

"All right, Jack. I am responsible for the rules. They shall be posted up in the mine to-morrow. Just you kick out the man that kicks against them, and trust to me to back you up. As to the fellow that laid you here, he shall not escape if there is any finding him. You are with me in that, Tom, eh?"

"Heartily," answered Mr. Sterling. "The man meant murder."

But we must return for a brief space to Tim Truepenny, whom we left in a very perilous predicament.

Pickax Pete, who had just clutched him and drawn him back from the window, was not the one to stop long in murdering him, if his own safety could be assured by it. He fully be-

lieved that he had killed Jack Manly. This boy was the only witness to the crime, and had threatened to betray him. Murderous thoughts filled the villain's heart, as he grasped the helpless boy in his firm grip.

Tim trembled with dread, as he felt himself dragged back from the window, and heard his captor growling above him, like a lion which has just caught a fawn. The light of the candle which Pete held displayed his face, to which a harsh rage gave a fiend-like expression.

"You poisonous young viper!" he hissed. "You as I picked out of the gutter, and have fed like a young nabob, and now you're goin' to turn on me, are you? You as I've brung up like a prince, you dirty little rat! He shook the boy fiercely. "You'll play ghost, will you? And you'll threaten to blow on me?"

"I never played ghost," stammered Tim. "It weren't no fault of mine that they got skeered."

"Don't tell me you didn't, you scaly little vagrant!" and he made Tim's teeth rattle in his head. "Anyhow, you threatened to blow on me 'bout Jack Manly."

"Just leave me go. I ain't done nothin'," demanded Tim.

"I leave you go! When I'm done with you you can go. You say ag'in what you said to-night, that you'd blow on me if Jack Manly died?"

He looked savagely into the boy's face, while his hard fist was tightly clinched.

Tim looked up fearfully, his thin lips growing bloodless.

"Will you blow, you mite? Will you blow?"

Tim could not lie. He did not remember ever having lied. And in all his fear there was a hot spirit of indignation in his blood. It was the murderer of his kind friend who thus threatened him.

"Yes," he forced himself to say. "If Mr. Manly's killed I'll let it out, if I die for it. And I don't care if you kill me for sayin' so."

"You will? Curse me, then, if I don't cure you of blowin' for the rest of your nat'ral life!"

The sledge-hammer fist was drawn back, the savage face glared tigerishly. Tim crouched before that fiendish glare, yet his eye did not turn away from that of the murderous wretch, nor did a cry escape his lips.

But the murderous blow was not given. Little Tim was saved; for at that instant the villain was seized from behind and wrenched half around.

"You sha'n't hurt the boy!" came the voice of his wife. "I tell you you sha'n't hurt the boy! Let go of him, Peter Plumtree, or I'll know why!"

And Sukey tore Tim from the grasp of her astonished husband.

"Curse you! how dare you meddle?" he yelled. "You want it yourself, then?"

His heavy fist was again drawn back.

But his wife did not fear him. She faced him boldly, her eyes fixed on his.

"You sha'n't hurt the boy, I say! And you daren't strike me, you coward! Here I am! Do it if you dare!"

Pete stood irresolute before his wife, cowed somewhat by her unflinching manner.

At that moment there came a voice from below stairs. The tones were those of Jake Bates.

"Where are you all?" he asked. "Are you up there, Pete? Come round to tell you it's all right. I jist heered. Jack Manly ain't dead, nor ain't goin' to die."

CHAPTER VIII.

MR. PRICE'S NEW RULES.

Two days have elapsed since the scenes of our last chapter. Jack Manly is about again. He has thrown off the stupefying effects of the blow which for the time prostrated him, and has regained all his old spirit and energy. As for Tim Truepenny it hardly need be said that he is none the worse for the rage of Pickax Pete. The determined interference of Sukey, and the news brought by Jake Bates, checked the murderous intentions of the villain. Brutal as he was he stood in awe of his resolute wife. She had told him the truth. He dared not strike her.

Within the mine everything is moving in its old fashion. The sturdy hands of the miners are rending the black diamonds of the coal vein from their deep grave beneath the mountain. Mules which never see the light of day are dragging the well-filled cars along the main gallery, to be hauled up the sloping inclined plane by the firm grasp of the engine that clanks steadily away at the mouth of the mine.

Tim Truepenny limps beside one of these mule teams. The men have become quite satisfied that he is no flitting shade, but a true flesh and blood boy, though some of them yet shudder as they see him with his pale face and his limping step stirring up the slow pace of his mules. It is not easy to get over an old fright, and particularly in the dark shadows which ever rest in the cavernous depths of the mine.

Yet there is some stir in the Edge Hill mine this morning. Yesterday Mr. Price made an inspection of the workings, and his cold, stern face was by no means welcome to the men. They had uncomfortable recollections of him in the past. To-day the cheery aspect of Jack Manly is again visible. But there is something else, something which is producing a feeling such as was never known there before.

Tim, as he keeps pace with his mules, observes the men coming out of their headings, with knit brows and angry faces, and clustering together at certain points in the main gallery, while deep mutterings, and an occasional fierce imprecation, break from their set lips.

"If he buys us for slaves he'll make a bad bargain of it, that's all I've got to say," growled one.

"Maybe he thinks a miner ain't got no soul," grumbled another.

Tim passed on out of hearing of that group, but he soon reached a second, composed of more unruly spirits.

"We's got to keep to our places, is we?" muttered Schylkill Sam. "Well, I wonder if we don't! I wonder if any fellar wants to go promenadin'! But ropes wouldn't hold me now. I ain't goin' to be ordered like a dog."

"Jist look at this," cried another, pointing to a white paper which Tim now saw posted up on

the side of the gallery. "Thar's to be no smokin'. To think of that! No smokin'. We've got to dust down on our pipes and baccy."

"The dirty old spalpeen!" roared Red Mike, with a deep oath. "Maybe it's angels he takes us fur. To think of his imperdence. He comes rattlin' up yere from Filadelfy and lays down the law to his betters. 'Feared o' firin' the damp, is he? And every fool knows there never was an ounce of damp in the whole mine. Jack Manly's bad enough, but old Price is worse."

Tim hurried on after his mule team, which had got some distance ahead. The boy could see that there was likely to be trouble in the mine. So far as he could make out, Mr. Price had made out new rules and had posted them up along the mine galleries. There was going to be an explosion. What he had heard was but the muttering thunder before the storm. The men went slowly back to their work, but with lowering brows and growling utterances. The nervous mode in which they handled pick and bar told of suppressed fury. The new rules were working. Mr. Price's handling of the mine was likely to make a sensation.

A shadow rested on Jack Manly's brow as he went about his mine duties. He had been given a task which he did not like. But his word had been passed. He had pledged himself to carry out the new rules, and was bound to do it at any risk.

"That won't do," he said to Harry Brown. "You've read the new rules, I suppose. There's no smoking allowed."

"And what for?" asked the miner, with a frown.

"For fear of firing the damp."

"Now don't you know, Mr. Manly, that there's no damp at all in this part of the mine? An open blaze wouldn't touch it off."

"What I know or don't know has nothing to do with it," answered Jack, decidedly. "That's the rule. I didn't make it, but no one shall break it; not even you, Harry."

"The man that made that rule hasn't the sense of a cackling hen," answered Harry, angrily, as he shivered his pipe to fragments against the rock. "Much he knows of the nature of miners, if he thinks he can make slaves of them. There's trouble breeding, Mr. Manly."

"I know it, Harry; I know it. But trouble or not, it's make or break with me. I've got my orders."

An hour afterward he met Pickax Pete, who was roaming in a desultory manner about the main gallery. There was a dark scowl upon his face.

"Come, come, Pete," asked Jack pleasantly.

"What's wrong?"

"There's enough wrong," growled Pete.

"I'm just out for a stroll."

"Come, get back to your work, my man."

"What fer?"

"Because that's the rule of the mine," answered Jack sternly. "Any man absent from his working breast during working hours is to be discharged."

"S'pose he runs out o' cartridges or breaks a pick?"

"He will have to do without, that's all."

"By the blessed pipers, then, I'll not do without. The confounded ninny that made such a rule ought to be tossed in the sump, or tramped to atoms by a mule team. That's my 'pinion."

"Get back to your work, Pete," answered Jack with an effort to speak pleasantly.

"Jist you see if there ain't a strike," was Pete's growling response as he moved slowly away. "And I'm the chap as'll engineer it if there's nobody else with the heart."

Jack made no reply. He knew that the men had some reason to be incensed, and that it was not wise to draw the new reins too tightly at first. Just now coaxing was better than driving.

The day passed on more quietly than the superintendent had expected. The men kept closely to their work, and obeyed every one of Mr. Price's stringent conditions with a docility that was threatening. It was the lull before the storm. So Jack Manly judged.

But not so Mr. Price. He made another inspection of the mine that afternoon, and was highly pleased with the quiet and orderly behavior of the men. He rubbed his hands with satisfaction when he met the superintendent.

"What did I tell you?" he asked. "Why, I don't believe the mine was ever in such order before. That comes of having a firm hand at the helm. What's all your predictions worth now, Friend Manly?"

"Wait," answered Jack briefly. "It takes time even for gunpowder to go off."

"Very well. We shall see how things are at the end of my month. I fancy that Edge Hill will be the model mine of the whole Schuylkill basin."

Jack smiled meaningly, but made no answer.

At that moment the boy Tim came excitedly up to where they were standing, his face full of concern.

"Excuse me, Mr. Manly," he cried, "but there's trouble above. There was a loose board and one of the mules is tumbled in the sump. It's up to its neck in the water, and we'll have to get some help to lift it out."

Jack hurried forward at this summons, to the foot of the slope. It was true as Tim had said. There was a mule in the sump.

It may be well, however, to tell our readers what a sump is, as the term may not be commonly known.

It is simply a deep excavation in the floor of the mine, at the foot of the slope up which the loaded coal cars are drawn to the open air. Into this excavation the water of the mine flows, and from it this water is continually pumped by the aid of the ceaseless engine. Only for constant pumping every mine would soon be drowned out by the accumulating water.

"That's an awkward job," cried Jack, looking down twenty feet to where the poor brute stood to its neck in the dark water. "Call some of the men here, Tim. We shall have to rig up the derrick and lift the creature out."

Tim was off like a shot, while Jack began to look briskly about for the lifting appliances. Ere he had looked long, however, his messenger was back, with an odd expression of countenance.

"Can't git none," cried Tim, briefly. "They won't come."

"Won't come?"

"No. It's ag'in' the rules, they say. They ain't goin' to break the rules."

The boy laughed, with a comical notion of the predicament.

Jack whistled.

"What's to be done, Mr. Price?" he asked that gentleman. "We can't rig the derrick without help."

A harsh frown came upon the mill-owner's face.

"This is ridiculous," he averred. "I never intended the rules to apply to cases like this. The idiots might have known that. Just wait. I will bring some of them."

He walked angrily away, carrying a miner's lamp to guide his steps.

Tim held his hand to his mouth to keep back a laugh.

"Isn't this prime fun?" he queried. "Do you think he'll fetch 'em, Mr. Manly?"

A queer smile came upon Jack's handsome face.

"The shoe is on the other foot now," he remarked.

They waited quietly for fifteen minutes. At the end of that period Mr. Price was seen returning alone, and with a deeply flushed face.

"They are a rascally set of idiots!" he blurted out on coming within hearing. "The rogues won't come, not a soul of them. They are afraid of breaking the rules, forsooth! I told them the rules didn't apply to such cases, but it did no good. They are too confoundedly docile. What's to be done, Mr. Manly?"

The stern mill owner was the picture of disgust.

"Maybe you'd best cancel that rule."

"I'll be hanged if I will, then!" was the angry reply.

"Let me try. Perhaps I can coax some of them. I know the reasonable ones."

Jack was gone for a considerable time. But when he returned he was accompanied by half a dozen men, Harry Brown at the head of them. His powers of persuasion had proved more effective than those of Mr. Price.

The men he brought were all efficient workmen, and it was not long ere the derrick was erected. Harry Brown descended the pit and placed lifting bands around the body of the patient animal, who stood perfectly quiet in his uncomfortable bath.

Soon they had attached the engine chains to the lifting rope, and given the signal to the engineer. The power of steam proved far more efficient than that of man. The animal was brought up so rapidly that he was nearly at the top of the derrick ere the signal to stop had reached the engineer. He was then quietly lowered to the ground and released, apparently very glad to feel dry earth beneath his feet once more.

But Mr. Price had enough of it. No sooner was the beast landed than he left the mine with a thoroughly disgusted look upon his face.

But he was not yet done with the working of his new rules. For at eight o'clock that evening a delegation of the workmen called on him,

Harry Brown at their head, to respectfully request that the rules should be withdrawn.

"It's just impossible to live up to them," declared their spokesman.

"And suppose they are not rescinded. What will you do?" Mr. Price angrily asked.

"Strike!" came a deep voice from the rear of the delegation.

"Strike, will you? Very well. Those are the fixed rules of the Edge Hill Mine. Just bear that in mind."

CHAPTER IX.

THE MEN SHOW THEIR HANDS.

It meant something when a man like Harry Brown headed the protesting party. The next morning, when Jack Manly entered the mine as usual he was surprised by a dead silence. Not a glimmer of a miner's lamp was to be seen; not a stroke of pick or bar to be heard. Quickly entering some of the working breasts he found them silent and empty. There was not a man in the mine.

Jack ran his fingers with an odd sensation through his hair. The new rules were working with a vengeance.

Descending to the main gallery again the faint glimmer of a lamp caught his eye. He hastened toward it. His quick vision soon caught the form of the boy Tim, who was coming hastily toward him.

"Didn't you know it afore?" he called to Jack.

"Know what?"

"That the boys is all turned out? They've struck, Mr. Manly. All except me and the mules. There ain't a man and a boy in the crowd as'll work a stroke while them new rules is up."

"The deuce!" whistled Jack. "I didn't look for much less though. And why aren't you with them, Tim? Some of them will do you a harm if you hang about the mine."

"I don't care," answered Tim doggedly. "None of them care for me, anyhow. You're the only friend I've got in the mine, Mr. Manly. While you stick to the mine, I'm goin' to stick to you, if everything bu'sts."

"Good, my boy!" cried Jack energetically, as he clasped the little fellow's hand. "Hang me, if you ain't true grit, right through! But look out, my lad. Keep quiet. You can't do much good, and these fellows won't stop to do you a mischief."

"Who knows what good I can do?" answered Tim bravely. "There's an old story of the mouse that gnawed the net, and let the lion loose. There ain't much of me, but there wasn't much of the mouse either."

"Pluck to the backbone!" he patted the boy's head. "There's no telling what's ahead, Tim. I'm afraid this is the beginning of trouble. Let's get out of the mine. We can do no good here."

In a few minutes they had made their way up the slope. The pump was still working, but the chain that drew up the loaded coal cars was moveless.

"Why didn't you tell me that none of the men had gone down?" asked Jack of the engineer.

"I didn't see you," was the reply.

"Very well. You keep to it, anyhow. You can smoke, dance or stand on your head if you want. Kick the new rules into the breaker if they are in your way. But keep that pump going. Don't let the water climb on you, for your life."

"Trust me for that," was the engineer's brief answer.

He wiped the black dust from his brow and proceeded to oil up his begrimed but smooth-running engine.

At this same moment a conversation of a different character was taking place in another part of the valley. The two owners of the mine were in a room of Mr. Sterling's house, which stood not far away from the mine opening.

Mr. Price rubbed his forehead with an air of great satisfaction as he turned to his partner.

"What did I tell you?" he remarked, triumphantly. "You and Jack Manly fancied that nobody but you understood the nature of miners. Why didn't you go down the slope yesterday afternoon?"

"I had no occasion to," answered Mr. Sterling, quietly.

"I fancy you were afraid of finding out who was in the right," answered his partner. "Why, man, you never saw such order. The rules are working like a charm. Every man at his post, not a pipe or a black look to be seen, everything in apple-pie fashion. The fellows saw at once that they had a master. That's what's been wanting here these three years, Tom. They've had too much liberty."

Mr. Sterling laughed incredulously.

"That's one day," he remarked. "One day is not a month. Wait. Time will prove who is right."

"I bet they are like angels to-day," cried Mr. Price, impatiently. "Of course I expected some kick-up like that last night. But you saw how I took the starch out of them. They won't try that soon again."

"Don't be sure. I am not easy on that score. When men like Harry Brown protest—"

"Harry Brown! I wish you'd quit quoting Harry Brown! See here, Tom, let's go down the mine. I wager high we find all as quiet there as in a church."

"I will answer for that," remarked Jack Manly, who entered at that moment. "It couldn't well be quieter."

"There! What did I tell you?" and Mr. Price turned triumphantly to his partner. "They feel a new hand at the helm."

But Mr. Sterling had detected some other meaning in Jack's tone. He turned to him inquiringly.

"What do you mean, Jack?" he asked. "They don't have the sound of picks and blasts in church."

"No more have they in the mine. There's not a soul there. The whole force is out on a strike!"

It would have taken a good artist to depict the expression on Mr. Price's face at these words.

He flushed deeply; ran his fingers nervously through his hair; stamped impatiently on the floor; then hastily snatched up his hat.

"It can't be! I don't believe a word of it!" was all he could say, as he rushed furiously from the room.

The two remaining men exchanged significant glances.

"It's true—every word of it!" remarked Jack. "The new hand at the helm has swamped the ship at the very start."

It was true enough. The men were on a strike, and they meant it, too. Days passed and not a soul of them returned to his work. Promises and threats were alike in vain. They swore they would not lift another hammer while those rules were kept up; and Mr. Price, on his part, swore that the mine might go to perdition before the rules should come down.

There was hot blood on both sides. As for Mr. Sterling he only smiled to himself. He was willing that his partner should have his month to run the mine.

Jack Manly was not idle. He had much to look after. In fact, he felt that the utmost vigilance was necessary. He did not fear the well-behaved miners, as represented by Harry Brown, but the other gang, headed by Red Mike and Pickax Pete, were not to be trusted. Jack had not forgotten the assault on himself; he feared mischief.

Mr. Price was not the man to fold his hands and wait for things to turn up. He went energetically to work to turn things up. First he sought to coax some of the men back by offering higher wages. That failed. Then he tried to get a force of new men from other parts of the mining region.

The higher wages offered were not without their effect. A force of men made their appearance at the Edge Hill mine.

But when they saw the lowering faces of the strikers, and came to fully understand the cause of the trouble, the most of them refused to go to work.

About ten men was all that could be raised by a week's active effort and the offer of specially attractive inducements.

As for these men, Mr. Price took care that they should be well armed, and lodged at the mouth of the mine. It was a dangerous duty they had undertaken.

Tim Truepenny kept away from the mine during these proceedings. Jack had positively forbidden him to come near it. But the boy was as earnest as ever to stick by his friends. He had no reason to love Pickax Pete, nor any of his gang. He had promised Jack to keep on his side, and did not intend to go back on his word.

One dark night during this period he had been sent by Sukey on an errand to a house at the other end of the valley. He was making his way with some difficulty back along the dark road. There was not a star in the sky and every step had to be taken blindly.

Somewhat weary at length with his difficult passage, he threw himself for a minute's rest on a roadside bank. In the distance the lights of some miners' cottages could be seen, but just around him the blackness looked thick enough to be cut with a knife.

He had not lain there a minute ere he heard steps moving in the field at the side of the

road. There came a suppressed curse as the sound of a stumble was heard.

"The devil take it!" cried a harsh voice. "It is as black as the hinges of the lower regions. A high old night to take Christians out of their beds."

"It would have been just the night to go for the breaker," answered a second voice. "We'll be sure to have the stars out to-morrow night."

"Hold your whistle!" cried the other, angrily, but cautiously. "It's none too dark for ears to be about."

"Ears, the deuce! Every soul is under cover. Except the boys that's to meet at—"

"Hold your whistle, I say!"

This was so decided that the other became silent. The two men moved on and were soon out of hearing.

The involuntary listener rose. He was trembling like a leaf. He had caught but a few words, but they were full of meaning. The unruly spirits among the strikers were not going to keep any longer on the defensive. They were preparing to take the offensive in good earnest.

A host of thoughts ran through Tim's brain as he stumbled on homeward.

"They're only workin' ag'in' themselves," he muttered. "They're goin' to burn the breaker. That's very nice, but s'pose they want to go to work afterward? How's they goin' to do it? Anyhow I know what's my duty. I'm bound to post Mr. Manly."

And so he did. The boy had learned the necessity of caution, however, and he took great care to avoid being seen by the strikers as he sought Jack Manly's house the next morning.

Jack struck his fist heavily on the table on hearing Tim's story.

"Just as I expected!" he declared. "I've been dreading something of the kind. But it's hard work looking for a ball when you don't know what side it is on. You're a jewel, Tim. So they're going for the breaker to-morrow night, eh? That's good as gold. They'll find me ready. I must see Harry Brown at once."

"But maybe he's in it," protested Tim.

"Not he. He's not that sort. His party don't want the breaker burned. There are two gangs of these strikers, my lad, and there's bad blood between them. One gang is up to any mischief. But the other is only striking against the rules. I can trust them to help me against deviltry."

Tim made his way out of the house as cautiously as he had entered it. He was followed, not long afterward, by Jack Manly, a look of satisfaction on his face. To his active spirit it was far better to know when and where to look for mischief, than to continue in the dark.

We shall not dwell on the events of that day. It is enough to say that none of our characters were idle. But when night fell at last, the locality about the coal-breaker was as silent as death. There was no evidence of either intended attack or defense.

A coal-breaker, as the reader may know, is an important and costly addition to every coal-mine. It is a huge structure of timber and screen wire, built against the mountain-side,

and extending from the mine-opening to the valley below. Its purpose is to separate the different sizes of coal, and thus to divide the coal which is continually gliding downward over its screens, into marketable assortments. Without the breaker the mine is almost useless.

About this particular breaker, as the night passed on, silence continued to reign. A quick ear might have fancied whispering sounds within it. But they might have been only the sighing of the wind in the pines.

And as the night grew older other faint sounds were heard without. It was a low patter, that at first hearing might have been taken for falling leaves. It was as dark as the previous night had been.

No one at a little distance could have sworn that there was a soul, either inside or outside. Yet the pattering sound came nearer and nearer, accompanied by whispering noises.

And now there came something like a stumble, accompanied by a low exclamation. Suddenly the breaker awoke from its long silence.

"Who goes there?" came a clear, sharp voice.

No answer. All fell into dead silence.

"Answer, or I will fire!"

Silence still reigned. There came a quick flash, the keen report of a pistol. For a single instant the flashing light dispelled the darkness, and lit up the surrounding scene. And in the foreground of that scene, not ten feet from the foot of the breaker, appeared a serried line of men; dark figures, with savage faces, in which burned the glow of suppressed excitement.

An instant more and all was darkness again, while not a trace remained of what the pistol flash had revealed.

CHAPTER X.

TROUBLE IN THE VALLEY.

A VOICE which the assailing crew had no difficulty in recognizing rung out through the darkness.

"Back, you hounds! It's a keen game you're playing, but we've checkmated you. Back, I say! In two minutes more we will sweep that spot with pistol balls. If there's a soul there then, I pity him."

"Devil take you, Jack Manly!" roared back a savage voice. "Do you think to scare us with blather? Fire, boys! We'll not give them two minutes."

A rattle of firearms followed the order. But the defending party were protected by the stout timbers of the breaker, and the bullets proved harmless. Jack's voice rung out again.

"There's thirty seconds left. Take my advice, and leave while your skins are whole."

Silence followed on the part of the defenders. But there were noises heard on the side of the attacking party, as if some of them were decamping, and others reloading their weapons.

"Time's up!" roared Jack. "You've had fair warning. Fire!"

A flash of pistol-shots darted out from the front of the breaker. The rattling volley was followed by some cries of pain, and by the sounds of hastily retreating steps.

The next moment, a keen glow shot out over the scene. A lamp had been kindled, with a reflector that threw its light over the spot lately

occupied by the strikers. But a decided change had taken place. Two or three dark forms lay stretched upon the ground. Others were sullenly retreating. But the greater number of the strikers were in full flight from the dangerous locality.

A second volley came from the breaker, echoed by some desultory shots from the strikers. Then the voice of Mr. Price rung out in stern command:

"After them, gentlemen! Leap the barriers and after them! Take prisoners wherever you can! By Jupiter, I'll teach these fellows a lesson that will cure them of burning breakers!"

At this order a dark line of men rose from the shelter of the breaker and sprung out into the open space before it. There was a hasty rush, the sound of cries and oaths, some heavy blows, the trampling noise of a fierce struggle, the spiteful crack of an occasional pistol-shot.

Down the slope in front of the breaker the combatants rushed. Blows, curses, shots, continued to near the level of the valley. Then the sounds of the struggle ceased, and the defenders could be heard returning, with the noise of loud talk and laughter.

Reaching the point of the first fight, it was discovered that the men who had lain stretched on the ground had disappeared. Wounded or not, they had taken the opportunity to escape.

"What is the result?" asked Mr. Price, as they came into the circle of light. "My man escaped me, and I am afraid has given me an ugly black eye."

"There are two prisoners," answered Jack Manly. "Bring them here, men, into the light. Let us see what kind of birds we have caught."

Among the defending party were several of the more orderly strikers. But though aiding in the defense of the breaker, they had been satisfied with performing that duty. They had made no effort to capture any of their fellow-strikers. The two prisoners were in the hands of some of the new men.

On being brought into the light they proved to be Schuylkill Sam and a man called Ike Barlow, two of the most doubtful characters among the strikers.

"Not a bad haul," cried Jack, with some satisfaction. "A brace of prime fish, I'll swear."

"By Jove, I'll salt them!" declared Mr. Price, in his sternest tone. "We need an example here."

The prisoners kept silent, but their lowering faces and the savage glare in their eyes told of the passions that raged within. Their clothes had been nearly torn from their backs in the struggle, and they presented a most disreputable appearance.

"Come, gentlemen, I fancy there's no more work for us to-night," remarked Mr. Price, rubbing his hands with satisfaction. "They'll not put torch to breaker this night, take my word for that."

"I am not so sure," answered Jack, with a shake of the head. "We had best leave a guard on the look out, and keep the light burning. That will help to scare off these night-hawks."

His advice was adopted. In ten minutes more silence again reigned about the breaker. Only a few sentinels remained on duty.

The night passed away, and the next day dawned. There was suppressed trouble in the valley, though the light of the sun failed to reveal it. In two or three houses men lay stretched on their beds, with pale faces and groaning bodies. Jake Bates had a pistol ball in his arm. It had escaped the bone, but it was a very painful wound. A second man had an ugly wound in the shoulder. A third had been struck in the thigh. None of these hurts were dangerous, but the wounded men were not likely to give any trouble for some time to come.

As for the remaining strikers, they were full of savage hatred against the mine-owners and their superintendent. But the taking of two of their number prisoners made them uneasy. They knew that they had a resolute man to deal with in Mr. Price. There was no telling what extreme measures he might take.

At three o'clock that afternoon a dozen of them assembled at Red Mike's cottage, their usual place of rendezvous. One man was put on sentry duty, to guard against spies. The others sat in Mike's best room, looking at each other with dubious glances.

"What's been done with the two boys? That's the first question," queried one of the strikers. "If they're in the valley I move we rip them out to-night. I'm afeard of Sam. He's got a loose tongue, and ain't got no backbone."

Red Mike shook his head.

"Old Price is too many for us," he remarked. "Sure he's sent 'em over to Planktown. There's not a ghost of a show to fetch 'em. Ain't I been thinkin' of that same meself?"

"Who was it turned traitor and posted the bosses? That's what I'd like to know," queried a fellow in the rear of the room.

"If you'd believe me you'd have no need to ask," replied another. "I'll bet my hat it's Lame Tim, that boy of Pickax Pete's. Didn't I track him to Jack Manly's house and away ag'in yesterday mornin'; and wasn't it him spied on us afore? Tell ye what it is, that boy's smelt a rat and blowed it. Pete's been too easy afore him."

"The blazes I has!" roared Pete indignantly. "What kind of rooster are you buyin' me for, I'd like to know? Why, I wouldn't trust the young scape-gallows 'cross my kitchen floor. S'pose I's brung up that rat and don't know his natur'?"

"Anyhow, I b'lieve it was him," returned the other. "He's a spyin' little rascal, and mought have cotched some of us tongueing it."

"By the 'tarnal blazes!" cried Red Mike, "that boy's got to be laid out. If he was my boy wouldn't I cool him? Faith, maybe I wouldn't, then."

"You kin do it and be hanged if you want to," rejoined Pete. "I daren't hurt him while Sukey's about. Now, that's gospel."

There came a laugh of derision at this acknowledgment by Pete.

"Go ahead, boys. I ain't got no sort of 'jection to yer laughin' if there's any good in it. But mebbe if some of you had a woman like my Sukey you might git some of your fun took out."

"Leave it to me," said the man who had first spoken. "As long as Pete's afeard of his wife,

why, I'll take it in hand. That boy's got to be settled."

"Hang the care do I care if you make mince-meat of him," returned Pete stolidly; "only I'm not goin' to do it, that's all."

The conference continued for some time longer, a dozen projects for revenge on the mine-owners being broached and discussed.

"That engine is got to be stopped," cried Pete at length. "If we can't work they sha'n't pump. Can't the engineer be coaxed over?"

"No more nor you could coax a mule."

"Then he's got to be laid out, you hear that? A judgmatical tap on the head, like. That's the only way you kin l'arn sense to sich men."

At eight o'clock the next morning Jack Manly made his usual visit to the mine opening. Everything appeared as ordinary. The breaker was intact. But as he came nearer he noticed a strange silence. There was none of the usual clank of the engine, no swash of water pouring from the mouth of the pump tube. Several men stood around the engine-house. These he recognized at a glance as some of the new hands.

"What is the matter?" he hastily cried on coming near. "Where is the engineer?"

"That's what none on us can make out," answered one of the men. "We's just out o' the mine. Put in an hour's work, and then come up slope o smell out what was wrong."

"That is very strange," exclaimed Jack rather uneasily. "Some of you run to his house and find out what ails him."

"Pat Ryan's done that same," was the reply. "And by that same token here he comes back now."

The little, red-haired Irishman in question hurried up, with an odd look on his face.

"Sorry the soul of him is there," he declared. "He left the house beyant two hours back."

"There's some deviltry afoot, sure enough," cried Jack. "Off with you, fellows. Hunt the bushes between here and the house. And take a look in the run yonder. This is strikers' work, I'll vow."

The men hurried off at this order, and commenced a thorough inspection of the locality. A path led up the mountain side from the engineer's house to the mine, but it wound its way through a thick growth of bushes, which offered fair opportunity for ambush.

The search soon ended. The body of the engineer was found in a dense part of the thicket. He seemed to have been felled by a foul blow, and then dragged in there from the path.

At first sight it was thought that he had been killed. He had received a heavy blow on the back of his head, from which the blood had run freely. But it was soon seen that he still breathed. He was locked in a heavy insensibility.

"Poor fellow, he has caught that for being faithful," said Jack. "Carry him home, lads. You, Ryan, run down to Mr. Sterling's house, and inform him of what has happened. I will stay here by the engine. If any of the strikers have a notion of paying it a visit, they'll find me here to welcome them."

The men obeyed his orders, and tenderly carried the hurt engineer home.

Jack set his teeth firmly as he proceeded to examine the engine.

"The hounds think they will stop the mine," he muttered. "But I'll be hanged if they do while I am on hand. I know something of the nature of a steam engine, and by the old Harry I'll run it myself until Phil is ready to return to duty."

There was no brag in this. The fires had been banked the night before, and he soon had a good pressure of steam in the boilers. A touch to the lever and the steam rushed into the cylinders. The piston-rod slowly moved. The huge fly wheel began to turn. Its speed increased. In and out sprung the rod, around and around whirled the wheel. Jack looked at it with an air of satisfaction.

"The mine is in working trim again," he said, with set teeth. "And it shall be kept so while I've got an arm to lift, or a leg to stand on!"

CHAPTER XI.

WHAT HAPPENED IN THE STORM.

WHEN Mr. Sterling came over at Pat Ryan's summons it was to find the mine again in working order. Jack Manly had thrown off his coat, rolled up his sleeves, displaying his bare, brawny arms, and had the engine rattling and clanking away like a live thing. The water poured in a thick stream from the pump tube, and the lifting chains had just hauled a brace of cars up the slope, to be emptied into the open mouth of the breaker.

The mine-owner looked on with much satisfaction as he saw Jack hurling coal in great shovelfuls under the boilers.

"Well done!" he cried, as Jack dropped the shovel, and wiped the sweat from his brow. "I did not know you had so much vim, Mr. Manly."

"Ah! Mr. Sterling, is it you?" queried Jack. "A deuce of a neat job this morning, isn't it, sir? But this mine's got to run, strikers or no strikers. I'm here. If those gentlemen want to call on me, they can find me on hand."

"Good for you. Is poor Phil hurt badly?"

"Can't say yet. He got a hard knock. But he has a hard head to meet it. I fancy he will pull through all right."

"I will walk over and see him," rejoined Mr. Sterling.

A half hour afterward Jack had another visitor. This was the boy, Tim, who came very cautiously into the engine-house.

"Hillo! my lad," cried Jack loudly. "What's loose? You look in a flurry."

"I'm afeared to stay at home," answered Tim. "I'm dubious of Pickax Pete."

"Why? Has anything happened?"

"Can't I stay here?" queried the boy.

"Mayn't I stay with you, Mr. Manly?"

"Certainly, my poor fellow. But what is it all about, Tim?"

"I dunno but they s'picion me for blowin' 'bout the breaker business. Pete looks queer; and he let out a thing or two. Maybe I'm too easy skeered, but I wouldn't stay in that house to-night for a fortune."

"The blasted villain!" muttered Jack. "I've

a shrewd notion that I owe him a trick myself. Stay here with me, Tim. They'll not try their rascally games where I am."

With a look of satisfaction at this permission, Tim hastened to make himself useful about the engine-house, putting things in their places and tidying up generally.

"Sha'n't I fire for you, Mr. Manly?" he asked at length. "I ain't bad at heaving coal."

"You? you little rat!" Jack laughed merrily. "I don't think I will hire you as a fireman just now. Wait till you get a few more pounds on your shoulders."

"Then maybe I'd best go down the slope. I can drive mules, anyway, and I guess you want all the hands down there at the coal veins. Can't spare them for boy's work."

Jack looked at him curiously.

"You're true grit, Tim," he said; "but we'll talk about that after a while. Just keep still, and get over your flurry now."

Tim subsided again, and an hour more passed in desultory work about the engine-house.

"Hal!" cried Jack, as the patter of rain-drops sounded on the leaves outside, "I thought that cloud meant something. We are going to have a pour."

It had grown very dark outside. The muttering of distant thunder was heard. The first few drops were followed by a more steady fall.

"Let it come; the ground needs it— What's that? I don't like that music."

Something in the sound of the engine had drawn his attention.

"There's a screw loose here. Hand me the monkey-wrench, Tim."

Tim went to the shelf on which the wrench was usually kept, but it was not there. He looked around the room. There was no trace of it to be seen.

Jack shook his head.

"I've a notion the engine has been tampered with," he remarked. "After doing for Phil they've come in here and loosened some bolts. I must have a wrench."

He looked around him uneasily.

"Let me run to Phil's house for one."

"I doubt if he has any there. I have one at home, now."

"Then I will go for it," declared Tim.

"You would have trouble in finding it. If you think you can keep things going here, I will run over and get it myself."

"Trust me for that," cried Tim. "I've helped Phil often. I ain't no blockhead 'bout an ingine, if I am only a boy."

Jack looked doubtfully around him, but there seemed no help for it—the wrench must be had. He looked out. The rain was still falling, and the thunder was coming nearer. At that moment a keen lightning flash shot vividly across the sky.

"I fancy you will not be disturbed," remarked Jack. "Shut and lock the door, Tim, and don't open it till you hear my rap." He gave three sharp blows on the door to teach Tim the signal. "And here, take this. If you are attacked don't be slow to use it."

He drew a revolver from his pocket, and thrust it into Tim's hand.

"You understand how to manage it, I suppose?"

"You bet I do!" answered Tim, proudly.

"Keep an open eye, then. Look for me back in ten or fifteen minutes."

He hoisted an umbrella which stood in a corner of the room, and plunged out into the storm. He heard Tim shut and lock the door behind him.

"That's right, my boy," said Jack to himself, as he pushed on. "I've a notion I can be spared for one fifteen minutes. But this shower is a bit too sharp for comfort."

His residence was not very far distant. But the rain had already made the path muddy, which delayed him somewhat in reaching it. Entering the door he soon had possession of the desired monkey wrench. He was about to set out again, when through the open door of the parlor he discerned the form of Mr. Price.

"Glad to see you, Manly," cried the latter. "Just came over, and got storm-stayed. What's all this trouble I hear of at the mine?"

Jack very briefly related the occurrence. He was anxious to get away. He lifted the window of the parlor and looked out at the rain. It still fell heavily, and the center of the storm seemed overhead. There were incessant flashes, and violent peals of thunder.

"The murderous wretches!" cried Mr. Price, angrily. "By Jove, I'll settle them yet. Dropped poor Phil, did they? Something will have to be done, Mr. Manly."

"Yes," answered Jack, absently. He was anxious to get away.

At that moment there came one of those sharp cracks of thunder, that seem to go to one's very marrow. Mr. Price started back.

"Bless us!" he exclaimed. "What's that? An echo of the thunder?" This question referred to a slight, whip-like report that quickly followed the great one.

"An echo?" yelled Jack. "No, by blazes, it's a pistol shot! As sure as fate there's trouble at the engine-house!"

Without waiting for a reply, or thinking of protection from the storm, he darted with an agile leap through the open window, and plunged forward through rain and mud toward the mountain slope. That distant shot had made him very anxious for his youthful assistant.

Mr. Price stood for a moment stupefied with surprise.

"Bless my soul, but folks have sudden ways about here!" he ejaculated. "I'd think a man crazy if he acted that way in the city. Well, well, I must follow, and see what is the trouble."

Possessing himself of Jack's umbrella, he hastened to follow him, though with many impatient exclamations at the difficulty of the way. A mountain storm was something he had not been used to.

By the time he reached the mine opening, the heart of the storm had passed over. The thunder was grumbling to the east, but westwardly a line of light declared itself, while the rain had sunk to a gentle fall.

But if the storm had declined without the engine house, it was raging within. The engine was at rest, but Jack was cursing at a rate to make the air blue.

"It's enough to drive a saint mad!" he fiercely declared. "And I never set up for saintship. Hang me if I can fathom it!"

"What is it?" queried Mr. Price eagerly.

"I left the boy, Tim, here on guard, with a locked door and a pistol, and the engine running away like mad."

"And the boy is gone?"

"Yes. I found the door wide open, the engine stopped, and the boy gone."

"The confounded little traitor!"

"Who? Tim Truepenny? Why, he is sound as steel! It's some of the strikers that has done this, and I fear they've done for the poor boy. You heard the shot. He was fighting for his life, poor fellow."

"But the door was locked, you say? How did they get in? There is no sign of violence."

"That beats me," answered Jack, shaking his head. "There's something confoundedly mysterious about it."

He had now somewhat recovered from his first excitement, and was in a mood to make some effort to penetrate the mystery. A brief examination of the mud around the door of the engine-house, showed the marks of various footsteps, some of which Jack judged to have been made by himself and Mr. Price. But there were other, sprawling steps, that seemed as if made by a miner's heavy boots. These were traced both approaching and leaving the door.

"I see no sign of the boy's steps," announced Jack.

"That is strange," returned Mr. Price.

"He has not walked away from here, that is sure. He must have gone on a man's shoulders. By heaven, I fear the boy has been foully dealt with! If you will stay here I will follow the fellow's steps. I may be able to track him in the mud."

Without waiting for a reply Jack was off up the mountain side, easily tracing the heavy tread, which had sunk deep into the mud. It led first by the path which ran for some distance up the hill. Here it was readily followed. But it then turned off into the bush, where only a faint path had been made. Here there was no mud, but the dead leaves soaked with the rain, held some impress of steps, and the eager scout held his way without a pause.

"By all that's good!" he ejaculated, "he is making his way straight for the old Blockly shaft. If he has flung the boy down there it is all up. It's a good two hundred feet sheer down."

A few minutes more brought him into a partly open space. In its midst, surrounded by a rim of bushes, was a yawning hole, ten feet across at top, and running down into the earth with sheer descending walls.

It was the abandoned coal shaft to which Jack had referred. A deep frown came upon his brow as he saw that the trail went straight to this opening. The low bushes around it were trampled, and the mud was kicked up on its very edge, as if by a vigorous movement.

Jack paused, and passed his hand uneasily across his brow, while he bent his eyes down into the deep dark hollow.

"It is all up with poor Tim," he muttered. "The devilish hound has tossed him down the shaft. Poor little chap, maybe he is better off."

for he had a dull life before him.—But if I can lay hands on his murderer, by the gods, I will revenge him!"

This thought stirred him up again. Leaving the brink of the old shaft he continued to follow the trail of the murderer. But the mountain flank about here became open stone, and he soon found himself at a loss. No footstep could leave a trace on that hard rock.

It was nearly an hour afterward when Jack slowly returned to the engine house. He had made every effort to rediscover the trail, but in vain. The villain had availed himself of the hard rock to hide his track.

"It is murder," replied Jack, to Mr. Price's eager inquiry. "The poor little fellow has been flung down the old Blockly shaft. If he were made of cast iron that would end him. By Jove, I'd give my head to get hold of the man that did it! The law would be at no cost to deal with him."

"He has wrecked the engine as well as murdered its guard," answered Mr. Price, gloomily. "What he has done to it I cannot imagine. But it is utterly out of gear."

Jack stared at him, and then at the engine. He turned the valve wheel, and let steam into the cylinder. Mr. Price was right.—The engine refused to move. But a hot gush of steam poured out from every joint of the steam chest that made Jack quickly shut off the valve and run for his life.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SECRET OF THE OLD SHAFT.

THE story of what had happened at the engine house ran like wildfire through the valley. The assault upon the engineer, the stopping of the engine, and the disappearance and probable murder of Tim Truempenny became everywhere known. An intense excitement prevailed. Looks of satisfaction passed between the more violent of the strikers, though even many of them disapproved of the murder of the boy. But in the orderly wing of the strikers a feeling of bitter indignation prevailed.

Harry Brown ran hastily to the engine-house, on hearing of the occurrence.

"Don't lay it on none of our party, Mr. Price," he declared. "There's not one among us but would sooner cut off our heads. We're striking, and we've got a right to. But we're not murdering."

"Nobody suspects you, Harry. We know you too well for that," answered Jack Manly.

"The devil that done it ought to be strung up," cried Harry, clinching his huge fist. "And I'm the boy would give a hand to it. Flung the boy down the old shaft, you say?"

"Yes."

"Do you suspicion the chap?"

"No. Yonder are his footmarks. Maybe some of you may know them."

At this hint Harry, followed by the other men, sought the trail which Jack had lately followed. They bent over it with eager scrutiny. But there was hardly a minute ere a cry of discovery came from the eager group.

"It's the man I thought it was," exclaimed a thin faced fellow, the shoemaker of the village.

"Nobody could fool me in the patch I put on

that shoe, hardly a week ago. And moreover he's the chap to stop the engine, for he brags as he knows the whole natur' of one."

"Who do you make it out to be?" queried Mr. Price, laying his hand on the talkative fellow's arm.

"It's Terry O'Grady, or Black Terry, as the boys call him. Why, I'd know his footmark in Chiny."

"Do you know the man, Mr. Manly?"

"Yes. He is one of the worst of the gang."

"He shall be arrested at once then; and for murder," said Mr. Price, sternly.

"Best wait a minute," answered Harry Brown, shaking his head. "Make sure first that the boy's killed. If the lads here will fetch a rope and a windlass I will go down the shaft, and look for the body."

No sooner said than done. The excited miners were eager for some active vent to their feelings, and hastened to obey Harry's suggestion. While they were procuring the coils of rope, Sukey, Pickax Pete's wife, came hastily up the hillside, her face burning with indignation.

"Is it so as my dear, poor boy has been killed?" she cried. "And that my Pete's the one that's done it? Tell me, Mr. Manly." She clasped the arm of the sturdy superintendent, and looked pleadingly into his face. "I can't believe it, Pete's a bad 'un but he can't be that bad."

"It was not Pete, at any rate," he replied.

"As for the boy I'm afraid he's gone. Harry Brown is going down the shaft for his body."

The poor woman turned away and wiped the tears from her eyes. She loved the lad, almost as much as if he had been her own child. He would not be without one sincere mourner.

By this time the men had gathered the necessary materials, and were making their way up the mountain side, toward the mouth of the old shaft. Sukey followed them with a very sad face. She knew well the savage temper of the miners, and had given up all hope of the boy's safety.

The windlass was soon firmly set and braced by the skillful hands that held it. A great length of rope was coiled around it, for the shaft was full two hundred feet in depth. A long, sloping beam stretched out over the center of the opening, from whose extremity dangled the rope, running over a grooved pulley. In the end of the rope was made a stirrup-like loop.

"Where is the chair?" asked Jack, looking around him. "The boy may not be dead. Why didn't some of you fetch it? Run down and bring it, somebody."

"Mercy on us, and have we got to wait longer?" exclaimed Sukey, wringing her hands. "It's enough to break one's heart, it is."

"No," cried Harry. "Dead or alive I can bring him up as tenderly in my arm as if he were lashed in a chair. To the windlass, lads. Let her run."

As he spoke he thrust one foot into the stirrup, caught the rope easily with his right hand, and swung out over the abyss, as carelessly as though but ten feet in depth lay below him.

"Lower away!" he commanded, holding himself upright with all the reckless ease of an old miner.

The windlass wheel was rapidly turned. Anxious eyes followed Harry's form as he quickly sunk into the shadowy depths of the old shaft. Soon only the faint gleam of the miner's lamp in his cap was visible. This, too, declined to the very faintest star of light. The thick coil of rope around the windlass shaft became less and less, until it seemed nearly run out.

"Have you rope enough?" asked Mr. Price, anxiously.

"Yes. He is near the bottom now," replied Jack. "There! He has touched."

The taut rope suddenly slackened and swerved toward the side of the opening. It was but for an instant, however, for its own weight quickly straightened it out again.

The suspense of the waiting crowd increased as no signal came from below. They pushed to the edge of the abyss and sought to penetrate its depths.

"Stand back!" cried Mr. Price, nervously. "That is dangerous. Some of you will fall."

"Not much danger," answered Jack, with a smile. "We miners are not troubled with weak nerves. Ha! lads, there's the signal from below. Haul away."

A quiver had ran up the rope, as if it had been violently shaken. Strong hands at the windlass soon began to thicken the coil around the shaft.

"How is the weight?" asked Jack. "Any extra pounds added?"

"We can't tell. The boy was such a feather we couldn't feel him, anyhow."

The eyes of the lookers-on were glued to the open mouth of the old shaft. Sukey stood with clasped hands, and as if ready to dart into the very hole itself after her beloved boy.

Turn after turn, the coil of rope was growing thick.

"Here comes Harry's lamp," cried one. "He's not twenty feet down. Hey, lad! what news from below?"

"Steady, steady," came Harry's voice, in hollow tones, echoing from the well. "Turn away, and you'll know in a jiffy."

"By the Lord, he hasn't the boy, anyway," cried the other.

At that instant Harry's head appeared in sight. A turn or two more and his whole body was revealed. It was true. He was alone. He had not brought up the boy, dead or alive.

"Out with it! What's the news?" cried Jack Manly.

"The hole is as empty as a new tin pan," returned Harry. "There's not a hair of the boy below. Thank Heaven he wasn't flung down there, at any rate!"

A loud cry burst from Sukey's lips at these words. Her pent-up excitement had to find vent in some form, and she screamed and tottered from very joy as though the worst news had come to her.

"There's a sell in it," remarked Harry, as he swung himself to the land. "He is not there."

"Then we must go for Black Terry," cried Jack, sternly. "That devil is at the bottom of it in some way."

At the very moment in which these events occurred the object of the search was just opening his eyes to life in a very different locality. Tim

was very far from being dead. Where he was, or whether he had only been asleep and dreaming he could not tell for the time being. His open eyes brought him no information, for all around him was of pitchy darkness.

He knew that he was on an earthen floor. The damp chill of the ground was very perceptible. And he knew also that there was a dull pain in his head. He lifted his hand to the spot and felt it very painful, while his hand became wet as if with blood.

A shudder passed through the boy's frame. He rose and groped his way through the darkness. Soon he came in contact with a rough stone wall. He followed this until his hands told him that the stone was replaced by wood. Finally he felt the frame of a door. Grasping the latch of this he sought to open it, but in vain. It was firmly locked.

With a baffled feeling Tim fell back on the floor of his dungeon. He was very weak, and his limbs would scarcely support his trembling frame. Seated there disconsolately in the darkness, he sought to recall the dream-like incidents that were running through his brain.

He could remember the departure of Mr. Manly into the storm, and his closing and locking the door behind him.

That done he had waited patiently, listening to the fierce thunder, and rather glad that he was under shelter. Finally a sound as of some person approaching was heard, and three loud raps came upon the locked door.

"Mr. Manly's signal," muttered the boy. "He is back soon."

He had hastily unlocked and flung open the door. But instead of the face he expected to see there were the stubby whiskers and beetling brows of Black Terry, one of the most villainous of the strikers. Tim had sought to close the door again, but too late. The strong hand of the miner pushed it open, with the exclamation:

"Nice signal you and Jack Manly has. Guess you didn't know there was ears about."

"Back with you!" cried Tim, tugging out his pistol; "or I'll put a ball through you!"

What followed the boy but half remembered. There was a quick spring forward of the miner, the explosion of the pistol, a fall of the villain's uplifted hand armed with some weapon. Tim knew no more till he found himself locked in a dark, damp dungeon.

But it is well that we should finish the story of this abduction by telling what happened after the boy's fall.

Black Terry had come prepared for his work, and the weapon with which he had felled the boy proved to be a tool which, in the villain's skillful hand, soon disabled the engine. Whoever next meddled with it would run serious risk of being scalded to death for his pains.

This done, he hastily caught up the boy, flung him across his shoulder, and rushed out into the storm. He was the man who had pledged himself to make way with Tim, and now was his opportunity.

The lad was as a feather in his grasp, and ten minutes' rapid movement brought him to the brink of the deserted shaft.

"Blast 'em all, they'll never think of lookin'

for him here," muttered the villain, as he looked into the dark opening. "I'll drop this spyin' rat into a trap as he'll not crawl out of soon."

Snatching the limp heap from his shoulder, he poised the lifeless boy aloft in his strong hands over the yawning cavity.

"Down with you! And may the devil stand below to catch you!"

A movement more, and poor Tim would have been crushed out of all likeness to humanity at the bottom of that precipitous hole. But at that perilous moment the murderous villain started back, while a deep oath came from his whiskered lips.

"By the blue blazes! I'd like to made a hangman's tool of myself for sure! The worse fool me not to see as I've left my track in the mud, and if the boy is kilt they'll smell me out by that patch in me boot sole. Devil take it all, I've got this boy on my hands and daresen't do for him."

Throwing the boy on his shoulder again, he rushed on over the mountain flank, carefully seeking the rock outcroppings to hide his footsteps. Very cautiously he made his way to a house on the flank of the valley, in whose cellar his unconscious victim was safely locked.

Poor Tim, in his underground dungeon, knew nothing of the danger he had escaped. He sat disconsolately on the floor of the dark cell for an hour more, revolving odd thoughts in his young brain.

At the end of this time the silence above him was broken. The sound of loud voices and hasty steps was heard. Then came oaths and a heavy fall. In a minute more the noises came nearer him. A crashing shock, as from a man's heavy boot, dashed open the dungeon door. The light poured into the deep gloom of the cell. Tim's eyes fell on the open face of Jack Manly.

"I've found him!" cried that sturdy fellow, in a tone of exultation. "Locked here in the cellar, and by Heaven, with a cut on his head as if he'd been hit with an ax! Come, my poor boy!"

He snatched Tim from the earthen floor and bore him rapidly up the stairs into a room in which the boy's bewildered eyes saw hosts of friendly faces.

But one scowling visage appeared among them, and that was the countenance of Black Terry, who lay coiled in a corner, into which he had been knocked by Jack Manly's heavy fist.

The next moment Tim was locked in a woman's arms, and Sukey's well-known voice cried above him:

"My poor boy! My poor, poor boy! You're safe yet, thank the angels! My poor, dear little Tim, as that black villain tried to murder!"

CHAPTER XIII.

PUMPING OUT THE MINE.

YET though Tim Truepenny had escaped with his life, and his would-be murderer, Black Terry, was held to answer the law for his action, otherwise the strikers had the best of the conflict. The engine was stopped, and there was not a soul in the valley competent to start it again. Meanwhile the water was rapidly gathering in the mine. For every week's stoppage

there would be needed two weeks' pumping to put the mine in working condition.

Phil, the engineer, was still disabled. He had been seriously hurt, and would not be able to leave his bed for some time.

In this dilemma a machinist was telegraphed for to a distant city. Before he arrived the engine had been at rest for two days. Those who went down the mine-slope reported the floor already covered with water.

The man at length came—a spare, sandy whiskered, sharp-faced fellow, whose jaws were in constant motion over a cud of tobacco. He accompanied the mine-owners and the superintendent to the engine-house, listening to their explanations, but saying very little in reply.

Arrived there, his keen eyes quickly ran over the motionless machine. By his orders the fly-wheel was turned by hand, while he listened intently to the sound made by the slow-moving machinery.

For ten minutes this silent inspection continued, while the anxious owners waited impatiently for his opinion.

"What could the man have done in a few minutes to utterly stop the engine?" queried Mr. Price.

The stranger made no reply. With provoking ease he took another chew of tobacco, rolled it for a moment under his tongue and then ejected a mouthful of tobacco-juice.

"Hand me that monkey-wrench," he said.

Grasping the wrench, he proceeded to remove the bolt that held the front plate of the steam chest. In a few minutes this was off, and he inserted his hand into the dark cavity. After a careful fingering he straightened himself and looked Mr. Price in the face.

"Just as I thought," he remarked.

"Just as you thought, eh? And pray what did you think?" asked Mr. Price, with a touch of angry impatience.

"A broken valve. It is slipped out of place, and all the steam in creation would not have moved that engine."

"But how did Black Terry do that?"

"He had nothing to do with it. It came by course of nature. All he did was to loosen the bolts of the steam chest, so as to make a blow out. There will have to be a new valve fitted."

But that could not be done in the valley. It did not boast a machine-shop. It was necessary to send miles away. And as the first piece made proved a misfit, nearly a week had passed ere the engine was again in serviceable condition.

Mr. Price fretted and fumed, growled and grumbled, but events did not move any the faster for his impatience. As for his partner, Mr. Sterling, that gentleman took things very quietly. In fact, a furtive smile marked his face, as he listened to the angry comments of his irate partner.

"The new rules are working splendidly," he remarked to Jack Manly. "Price's month is more than half out, but he can have the full length of his rope. No doubt he will teach us how to run a mine."

Once more the engine obeyed the power of steam and the huge fly-wheel revolved with all its old speed, while an incessant stream of water poured from the mouth of the pump-

tube. But during the enforced stoppage the mine had become badly drowned out, and it was calculated that two weeks' constant pumping would be necessary to reduce the water to its old level.

Meanwhile other events were taking place not calculated to help Mr. Price's temper. His efforts to increase his working force from abroad proved utter failures. The violent temper of the strikers became known, and men were afraid to take advantage of the increased wages offered.

Indeed, of those already secured, a full half took the opportunity of the stoppage to get away from that dangerous locality. Of the remainder, two, who had ventured into the village after nightfall, were discovered and assailed by the strikers, and only escaped a dangerous pummeling by showing a clean pair of heels.

At an early hour next morning these men and their comrades made their way to the train. They had concluded that the Edge Hill Valley was growing too hot to hold them.

It may be imagined that the state of Mr. Price's temper was not improved by this circumstance. He was completely at a loss what to do next. As for yielding he had not a thought of it. He was of that stubborn disposition which only grows more obstinate with every new difficulty.

He was given an opportunity to retire gracefully, if he had wished to do so. Harry Brown, who was the acknowledged leader of the orderly strikers, had said to his fellows:

"Come, lads, I shouldn't wonder if the bosses was getting enough of this business. But I s'pose they're a little too proud to ask us back. I move that we give them a chance to back down. Anyhow I'm getting a bit tired of playing gentleman. Hammering coal is more in my line."

"But the mine ain't fit to go in now," objected one of his hearers.

"It will be in a week. We'd best know what's to be done. If I can't work here I must work somewhere else."

At this suggestion a delegation of the miners, headed by Harry, called on Mr. Price. That gentleman received them very pleasantly. He fancied that the strikers were feeling the pressure in their pockets, and were ready to give in.

"We've just dropped round, Mr. Price," began Harry, politely taking off his hat, "to say as we don't nohow approve of the way Pickax Pete's gang is carrying on. We're strikers, but we ain't of the knock-down and drag-out sort. There's nobody can say that we've got anything to do with this murdering and engine-tapping business."

"You don't need to tell me that, Harry," answered Mr. Price, pleasantly. "I would as soon suspect Jack Manly as you."

"It's just a question of work or no work, that's all," continued Harry. "We've got our arms and our iddication, and you've got your mine. You want coal and we want wages. You give us wages and we'll give you coal. Now that's simple and easy to settle, isn't it, sir?"

"Exactly," answered Mr. Price, rubbing his hands with satisfaction. "There's the mine,

my lads. Strike in as soon as the water is out, and I don't think we will have any further trouble."

He cast a look of triumph at Mr. Sterling. But that gentleman sat with a faint smile on his lips. He could see that there were stormy waters behind all this smooth sailing.

"That's clever," replied Harry. "I'm glad we've hit the mark so easy. There's one other little item. That is, to take down them ridiculous rules, which no man in his senses can live up to, and the whole of us will strike in, bone and sinew."

"Take down the rules?" stammered Mr. Price, with a bewildered utterance.

"Yes, that's all any of us boys ask. We're not going to be cranky."

"But that's all there is to ask."

"Well then, it can be settled the easier," Harry stolidly answered.

"I'll be hanged if it can, then!" roared Mr. Price, as his surprise gave place to anger. "There's nothing like being cool, but you can't buy me for a baby, Harry Brown. Those rules stay up, work or no work."

"Then we stay out, coal or no coal," returned Harry. "I was in hopes that you'd come back to common sense, Mr. Price, and found out that even a working man has some rights. And you'll excuse me for saying that it would have been a good deal wiser if you had stayed where you came from, and left Mr. Sterling to run the mine. Come, lads, I s'pose there's no use wasting words."

Mr. Price's hasty temper had now reached a pitch of fury.

"By Jove," he cried, "but this is rich! Maybe you'd like to take the mine and run it on your own hook? I tell you what it is, I am running that mine, not you. Those rules stick if every soul of you never strike blow in it again. You hear that!"

"And we'll never work under them, if we never strike blow again," replied Harry, sternly. "You've given us your last word and we'll give you ours. The mine will be dry in a week. You can have that week to change your mind. If those rules don't come down it's good-by to Edge Hill for us. We can find work where we don't have to be slaves. Come, lads, there's no use wasting words."

The delegation followed their spokesmen out, their looks indicating that they fully agreed with him in his ultimatum.

"Well, may I be hanged—" began the furious mine-owner. He could get out no more words, and stamped his indignation on the floor.

"Good Heavens, Tom Sterling!" he continued angrily. "One would think you had no interest in this matter. There you stand, coolly smoking your cigar, and smiling as if you enjoyed the way these dogs are insulting me! I am out of patience with you."

"Excuse me, Price," quietly answered Mr. Sterling. "Your month is not up yet. I agreed not to interfere." He puffed easily at his cigar.

"Deuce take me, but you're worse than the men!"

Mr. Price flung the door violently open, and ran out to cool his temper in the out-door air.

Mr. Sterling quietly laughed.

"I fancy Price is going to find out that men can't be handled as you'd handle pig-iron or coal," he remarked. "He had better practice at driving mules before he tries it on miners."

We must run hastily over the events of the succeeding week.

Phil, the engineer, was out of bed and able to move around again, but was not yet in condition to resume the command of his engine, which was still under the charge of the machinist.

The boy, Tim, not able to get over his dread of Pickax Pete, had taken up his residence with Jack Manly, whom he served as a sort of second lieutenant.

The mine water was now rapidly lowering, and there was reason to believe that it would be in working condition by the end of the week.

The week ended. Monday morning came. The temporary engineer called on the mill-owners.

"The water is all out," he announced. "The mine is in working trim, and your own man has got his head again. I fancy I can go back to the shop."

"You have done a good two weeks' work," replied Mr. Sterling. "We have the mine; it is now only a question about the men. How now, Price? What have you to say about the new rules?"

"They shall stick, men or no men!" was the dogged answer.

"It'll be no men, then," remarked Tim Truepenny, who had just entered with a message. "Harry Brown says as how the week's up, and the rules ain't come down. Him and the rest strike out this afternoon for the Slope Run region. They swear they're done with Edge Hill."

Mr. Price gazed at the boy steadily for a full minute without saying a word. He then turned on his heel and left the room. The others present looked on in some surprise at this action.

A half-hour afterward a gentleman, who wore a linen duster and carried a traveling-satchel, might have been seen walking with great strides toward the railroad station. He evidently was not anxious to be observed.

An express train came up in a few minutes after he reached the station. Quickly stepping on board, he was soon driving away at great speed from Edge Hill valley.

Two hours afterward, a telegram from a station far down the road was handed to Mr. Sterling. Not knowing what had happened, he tore it open with some curiosity, and read as follows:

"Good-by, Tom. My month is up, and I am off for Philadelphia. You can run the mine as you please. Blow it up if you want to. I wash my hands of it. But the next time I try to drive miners I'll take a month's practice at pig driving first."

"HARVEY PRICE."

A laugh of exultation broke from Mr. Sterling's lips. He handed Jack Manly the telegram.

"Read that, Jack," he cried. "Price has thrown up the sponge, and is in full retreat. Off with you after the men. Don't let them go. Tell them Tom Sterling has hold again, and down come the new rules."

"And while he's doing it, I'll make for the mine, and rip them off the walls," exclaimed Tim, as he eagerly followed Jack from the room.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE FLASH OF THE DAMP.

JACK MANLY was too late in his effort to intercept the departing miners. He found that some ten of the best men, headed by Harry Brown, had already left the village, with the purpose of seeking work elsewhere. The remainder absolutely refused to enter the mine. They were hand and glove with their fellows, and would not go back on any bargain which Harry and his companions might make. Jack returned a little crestfallen.

"Something will have to be done, Mr. Sterling," he said. "Our rough boys are ready to jump in. But it will be a queer kind of working gang that is made up of the refuse of the village."

"Price's month lasted a day too long," replied Mr. Sterling, musingly. "I don't just see my way clear."

"Why, they're off in the accommodation, sir," remarked Tim, who was present. "There'll be an express along in an hour that'll beat it hollow."

"By Jove, the boy has hit it!" cried Mr. Sterling, excitedly. "I'll after them, express haste! They can make their own rules, hang them. I am not afraid of their overstepping the mark. You can get the mine ready for work, Jack."

"It must be ventilated first," remarked Jack. "I will set the air-pumps going."

"And it's half full of fire damp," suggested Tim. "I was just down slope."

"Beware, then, of an explosion," returned Mr. Sterling. "I must be off. I leave it in your hands, Mr. Manly."

In an hour more he was rattling out of the valley on the afternoon express. Jack quickly had the air pumps going, and was driving the life-giving air in great volumes into the long deserted mine.

"You will have to make a night of it, Phil," he said to the engineer. "It must be dreadful stale down there. But if you drive fresh air in till morning it may be fit for a Christian to venture down."

"It's bad enough now," remarked Tim. "I was down to the level, and found it choking full of damp. Had to slide up ag'in in a hurry."

While these events were transpiring there was a part of the mining force greatly gratified at the turn things had taken. The rough crew, as represented by Pickax Pete and Red Mike, had begun their month's idleness with very little money in their pockets. This had soon vanished in improvident living, and for two weeks they had been put to great straits to obtain the necessities of life. Thus the hope of going to work again came to them as a great relief. Several of the most violent of the party were in prison, and of those remaining the mass were not actively wicked, but had merely let themselves be led astray by the influence of their ugly-tempered associates.

On Tuesday morning, therefore, when Jack Manly prepared to descend the mine slope, he

found a group of these fellows gathered about the opening, eager to get back to their long-forsaken work.

"The new rule is down," cried one, "and that was the only peg in the way. We's the boys as is ready to swing pick and drive bar with any gang in the mountains."

"Stay where you are," remarked Jack, running his eye coolly over the rough group. "I am going down to test the mine. It must be cleared of damp first before any one goes to work."

With a Davy safety lamp attached to his cap front he plunged into the mine opening, and was soon lost to view down the dark slope. The men looked after him. With their usual heedlessness they could see no use in such extra precaution, and were quite ready to dive into the perilous underground depths.

"Faix, one might think as niver a soul of us had been down a slope afore," growled Red Mike. "Jack Manly better put us in a cradle and feed us on pap, like so many babies."

"I'm goin' down," cried Pickax Pete. "S'pose the damp's any wuss for us than for him? I guess we're old enough to take care of ourselves."

"You'd best stay where you are," warned some of the more cautious.

But warning was lost on the reckless miners. Lighting their lamps, Red Mike, Pickax Pete and two or three others pushed into the slope, heedless of the unseen dangers of the mine. After them slipped the boy Tim, eager to share the danger of his kind friend, the superintendent.

The remainder of the men continued at the surface, and eagerly waited the report of their more daring comrades.

And still the powerful engine clanked away, driving the life giving air through every channel of the mine.

Had they seen all that was going on within those cavernous depths they would scarcely have waited so quietly on the summit. We must follow the bold men who had thus left the light of day, and trace their adventures within the mine.

Jack Manly, on reaching the main gallery, proceeded cautiously forward, testing the air of the passage for fire damp as he did so.

"All sweet here," he muttered. "The engine is telling. If there's any of the obstinate stuff it is hanging in the working drifts, and at the dead ends of the galleries."

He went slowly forward. Caution was necessary, for it was impossible to tell the condition of the deeper regions of the mine. Indeed, after a half hour's exploration he found evidences of damp unmistakable. And it was mixed with the air of the mine in the most explosive proportion.

"It won't do." He shook his head doubtfully. "It will take another day and night of ventilation. If I let the men down here now they would be sure to blow up the mine. Ha! the daring fools. There's some of them down now!"

This exclamation was caused by the sight of an approaching light. It came nearer, and his quick eyes caught the face and form of Pickax Pete.

A harsh frown came upon Jack's brow. He

had not rested quietly under the stunning blow which he had formerly received in that very gallery. He was not the man to forgive treachery so easily, but had shrewdly investigated the occurrence until he was satisfied that Pickax Pete was the man who had assailed him. Naturally, then, he now beheld him with an impulse of anger.

"What brings you here?" he cried, harshly. "Did I not order that no one should follow me into the mine?"

"We're not babies, Jack Manly!" Pete insolently rejoined. "S'pose old chaps like us don't know the natur' of the damp? We're not green hands, to blow ourselves to Jericho."

"I don't care a fig what you are!" was the impatient answer. "I would have you know that I'm boss in the Edge Hill mine, and when I say no man is to follow me I mean it. And you, least of all."

"I dunno' as I've done nothin'," Pete sullenly replied.

"You haven't, you murderous hound? Who but you sought to kill me in this very gallery! Hang you! if there's never a blow struck or a blast fired in the mine, you shall not lift a hammer in it. It is not big enough to hold you and me both."

"It's a lie, whoever says it!" roared Pete in reply. "I didn't touch you, Jack Manly, though I owe you no love."

"You lie, you dog, you did!"

"Lie, do I?" The huge fellow closed his fists and advanced threateningly. "I don't take no sich word as that from no man."

"You will have to take it from me," answered Jack, fiercely. "You're a murderous dog, and by all that's good you shall see the inside of a jail before you're a week older."

"Then I'll give you something more to do it for!" cried Pete, furiously.

He sprung forward and struck a hard blow at Jack's face. But the latter was on the alert. He easily parried the blow and surprised his antagonist by a sharp return that laid him prostrate on the rocky floor.

Roaring like a wild bull the furious miner scrambled to his feet again and ran madly forward, striking fierce blows with his heavy fists. But it was the effort of brute strength against science. Jack knew thoroughly how to use his fists, and played his one, two, three on the bully's face until it was puffed up like a bladder.

Pete failed to get in a single blow, while he was being severely punished. Another opening and another sharp tap on the temple, and he went down like a stricken bullock. This time he was in no haste to get up, but remained prostrate, breathing heavily and cursing in a low tone.

"There, I fancy I have taught you a lesson," said Jack, looking down contemptuously on the fallen bully. "That pays up for the past, but don't you ever set foot in this mine again."

He walked away, leaving Pete prostrate and bleeding. The miner's lamp had been extinguished in the fray, and he remained in utter darkness. There was no light except that coming from the diminishing gleam of the superintendent's lamp.

The whipped bully scrambled to his feet and

staggered on after this light, his dark mind full of revengeful thoughts.

Heedless of danger Jack moved slowly on, stopping here and there to examine some point in the mine. He did not dream that murder was tracking his footsteps.

There did come to him a faint suggestion of sound, as if there were some one in the mine besides himself. But at this moment a light appeared around a distant angle of the gallery, and rapidly approached. His quick eye recognized the form of the boy, Tim.

"What brings you down here?" he sternly asked. "Did I not order—"

"Ware!" cried Tim, with startling energy. "Stoop!—Oh! Lord save us!"

His warning came too late. The last exclamation was drawn out as a stunning blow fell upon Jack's unprotected head, knocking him senseless to the floor.

Tim had first sprung forward, with fiery impulse. But he now turned and fled through the mine, with cries of "Help! Murder! Pickax Pete has killed Mr. Manly!"

"Yes, and I'll do for you, too," and the pursuing villain closed his hand on the lame lad. "I've often promised to settle you, you dirty little rat; and now's the time!"

His heavy fist struck Tim a fearful blow, and hurled the shrieking boy upon the form of his helpless friend. Pete looked down upon them with glaring eyes.

"If I'm not to work in the mine again, you sha'n't," he muttered. "I'll pay you out for the way you sarved me."

With dark thoughts lurking in his savage brain, he tore the lamps from the cap fronts of his two victims. One of them he hooked to his own. The other he placed on the floor, and with a savage wrench broke open the wire screen which forms the safety appliance of the Davy lamp. The naked flame shot up into the air, so full of inflammable gas.

"You come down to find the damp. Maybe you'll find too much of it," muttered the villain, as he rose and ran for his life along the wide gallery.

Yet, run fast as he would, the vengeance he had invoked ran faster.

There came a blinding flash; a thunderlike roar; a terrible rush of air through the avenues of the mine. The fleeing murderer was caught up as though he had been a feather and dashed with terrible force against a rugged wall of rock.

When he fell back to the floor no life remained in his crushed limbs. He had fired the perilous gas and was the first victim to the deadly power which his own hands had set loose.

CHAPTER XV.

WHAT FOLLOWED THE FLASH.

THE terrible event which had happened within the mine did not fail to make itself evident to those outside. A peculiar rumbling noise came to their ears; but it was preceded by a gush of air from the mine mouth, and a sudden flash that for an instant lit up the slope.

"Good Heaven! the damp has exploded!" was the general cry, as they fell back in dismay,

their eyes wide open with fear and excitement.

"And a half-dozen poor fellows down there," exclaimed the engineer. "It's a terrible bad business."

"They mayn't be all dead," cried one of the men. "We must go down, lads, afore the smotherin' after-damp comes along. It's only a touch and go flash. There's no further harm, except it's set fire to the coal."

A half-dozen volunteers were quickly found to accompany him. There was no time to be lost. The heavy carbonic acid which gathers after an explosion might smother all who remained alive. Hastily providing themselves with the necessary appliances they hurried down the sloping entrance gallery, and were soon on the mine floor.

It was as the miner had said, a touch-and-go explosion. There was no light in the mine, and but little difficulty in breathing the air. Dividing themselves into squads they rapidly made their way through the various galleries, keeping a keen lookout for the imperiled miners.

"Here's two of them, and dead as door nails!" cried a pioneer, as he came upon the forms of Jack Manly and Tim. "And by thunder, an open lamp along side. No wonder the damp flashed."

The forms were recognized as those of the superintendent and Lame Tim. Hastily lifting them the stalwart miners bore them back to the foot of the entrance slope, and laid them in an open car that stood there.

Hardly had they done so ere others of the searching party appeared, evidently carrying something heavy.

"What's the news?" was the cry.

"Two gone under!" came an excited reply. "Dashed to atoms, poor devils! It's Pete and Red Mike. They've mined their last coal!"

While this conversation was going on two other men appeared from a side gallery. They were unwounded though badly frightened. They had been too far away from the exploding gas to feel its full effects.

"Good! There's two alive, at any rate. That's all that came down. Hook on, and give Phil the signal to pull. The after-damp is thickening."

Throwing themselves into a second car, they lay down so as not to be struck by the low roof of the slope, and were quickly drawn up by the power of the engine.

The news of the explosion had by this time spread through the valley, and anxious men and women were streaming from all points to the scene. The crushed bodies of Red Mike and Pickax Pete were first lifted from the car and laid on the board platform beside the engine-house. Then the two other insensible bodies were removed.

"Poor little Tim!" said one of the miners, feelingly. "It's a pity for him. But where has he got it? He don't seem to be burnt nor torn."

"No more does Jack Manly," replied another. "I dunno what's killed them, except it's swallering the fire."

"Killed them! By the Lord, they are no more dead than I am!" exclaimed Phil, the engineer. "Don't you see the man's breathing?"

Snatching up a bucket of water he excitedly dashed it over the two forms which lay side by side on the platform. It was a rough but effectual remedy. A quiver passed through Jack's form. He stirred and turned heavily over. His eyes opened and gazed with bewilderment into the surrounding faces.

It had a still stronger effect upon Tim. A choking cough burst from him. He scrambled up upon his hands and feet, with an odd grimace.

"Where am I? What has hapened?" asked Jack in faint tones.

"We picked you up for dead. The fire damp went off around you."

"Me dead? You don't kill Jack Manly so easy. I'm worth a dozen dead men yet. What's the harm? Anybody hurt?"

"Yes. Red Mike and Pickax Pete have gone under."

"Pickax Pete?" recollection was slowly returning. "By all that's good, men, he tried to kill me! If he is dead, he is only paid back in his own coin."

We need not follow up this conversation. Further research brought out the facts of the case. It became evident to all that the explosion was no accident, but had been a deliberate effort on the part of Pickax Pete to destroy the victims of his malice. By a strange fatality his murderous scheme had turned against himself. He had been crushed by the bomb his own hand had kindled.

The safety of Jack and the boy was assured by the very causes which the murderer had counted on to kill them. The flame had flashed from them, not toward them. Their position had resembled that of a man who starts a prairie fire to burn out in all directions from him, and leave him safe in the center. Their prostrate position saved them from the violent recoil of the air of the mine. And their insensible and almost unbreathing condition had secured them against the poisonous carbonic acid, which the explosion of fire-damp leaves in the low levels of the mine.

It seemed almost as if fate had interfered to protect them from the death that threatened.

Our story may be briefly ended. Mr. Sterling's mission proved successful. He brought back the seceding miners with him, ready and

anxious to go to work as soon as the mine was in condition. The strike was definitely over, but the strikers had won, and Mr. Price's new rules, which were to work such wonders in the mine, came down with a rush as soon as that gentleman's back was turned.

A few days more of ventilation and the mine was pronounced in shape for working. Once more the sound of hammer and pick and the muffled roar of the blast sounded in its cavernous depths. Once more the coal came rapidly up the slope, to be poured into the breakers. Once more the mule teams slowly drew the loaded cars along the dark galleries. But Lame Tim no more drove them. He had ceased to be a mule boy of the mines.

In fact, Jack Manly had decided that the boy was unfit for such labor. There was more in him than was necessary for mule driving, and Mr. Sterling, who fully appreciated the boy's services during the strike, undertook to send him to school and give him an education.

He also saw that Sukey, the widow of Pickax Pete, should not come to want. Tim continued to live with her in the old house by the mountain side, but it was a far different life now that their tyrant was no longer there to make their lives miserable. She loved the boy as if he had been her own child, and he looked up to her as to a mother. Two happier persons could not easily have been found in Edge Hill Valley than the couple who lived in Pickax Pete's old residence, and indulged in fried apples whenever it pleased their vagrant fancies.

The Edge Hill colliery still continues under the ownership of Messrs. Price & Sterling. But the elder member of the firm attends only to the city branch of the business, and is quite content to leave the mine in Mr. Sterling's care. He is satisfied that nature never intended him to run a mine.

Jack Manly is still in their service. Now that the mine has been well weeded of its dangerous elements he has no further trouble, and is one of the most successful mine superintendents in the whole region.

As for Tim Truepenny he has been elevated to the position of bookkeeper and private secretary for Mr. Sterling, and no one in the trim, neat, good-looking young man would ever recognize Lame Tim, the Mule Boy of the Mine.

THE END.

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